

THE

1607/4354.

Ambitious STEP-MOTHER;

A

TRAGEDY:

As it is Acted at the *New Theatre*
in *Little Lincolns-Inn Fields*,

By His MAJESTY'S Servants.

Written by
N. ROWE, Esq; Author of *TAMERLANE*.

The THIRD EDITION.

——— *Decet hac dare dona novercam.*

Ovid. *Metam.* lib. 9.

Vane Ligur, frustra; animis elata superbis.

Nequicquam ——— tentasti lubricus artes,

Advenit qui vestra dies muliebribus armis

Verba redargueret.

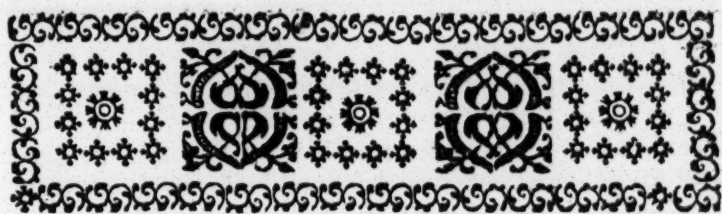
Virg. *Æn.* lib. 11.

L O N D O N :

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1607 / 4354



TO THE
 Right Honourable
 THE
 Earl of *JERSEY*,
 Lord Chamberlain of his MA-
 JESTY'S Household, &c.

My LORD,



F any thing may atone for the Liberty I take
 in offering this Trifle to your Lordship, it is,
 that I will engage not to be guilty of the com-
 mon Vice of Dedications, nor pretend to give
 the World an Account of the many good Qualities they
 ought to admire in your Lordship. I hope I may reckon
 on it as some little piece of Merit, in an Age where there

are so many People write Panegyricks, and so few deserve 'em. I am sure you ought not to sit for your Picture, to so ill a Hand as mine. Men of your Lordship's Figure and Station, tho' useful and ornamental to the Age they live in, are yet reserv'd for the Labours of the Historian, and the Entertainment of Posterity; nor ought to be aspers'd with such Pieces of Flattery while living, as may render the true History suspected to those that come after. That which should take up all my Care at present, is most humbly to beg your Lordship's pardon for importuning you upon this account; for imagining that your Lordship (whose Hours are all dedicated to the best and most important Uses) can have any Leisure for this Piece of Poetry. I beg, my Lord, that you will receive it, as it was meant, a Mark of my entire Respect and Veneration.

I hope it may be some advantage to me, that the Town has not receiv'd this Play ill; to have depended merely upon your Lordship's Good nature, and have offer'd something without any degree of Merit, would have been an unpardonable Fault, especially to so good a Judge. The Play it self, as I present it to your Lordship, is a much more perfect Poem than it is in the Representation on the Stage. I was led into an Error in the writing of it, by thinking that it would be easier to retrench than to add: but when I was at last necessitated, by reason of the extreme Length, to cut off near six hundred Lines, I found that it was maim'd by it to a great disadvantage. The Fable (which has no manner of Relation to any part of true History) was left dark and intricate, for want of a great part of the Narration, which was left out in the first Scene; and the Chain and Connection, which ought to be in the Dialogue, was interrupted in many other Places. But since what was omitted in the Acting is now kept in, I hope it may indifferently entertain your Lordship at an unbending Hour. The Faults which are most generally found, (and which I could be very proud of submitting to your Lordship's Judgment, if you can have Leisure for so trivial a Cause) are, that the Catastrophe in the fifth Act is barbarous, and shocks the

The Epistle Dedicatory.

V

the Audience. Some People, whose Judgment I ought to have a deference for, have told me, that they wish'd I had given the latter part of the Story quite another turn ; that *Artaxerxes* and *Amestris* ought to have been preserv'd, and made happy in the Conclusion of the Play ; that besides the Satisfaction which the Spectators would have had to have seen two virtuous (or at least innocent) Characters, rewarded and successful, there might have been also a more noble and instructive Moral drawn that way. I must confess if this be an Error, (as perhaps it may) it is a voluntary one, and an Error of my Judgment : Since in the writing I actually made such a sort of an Objection to my self, and chose to wind up the Story this way. Tragedies have been allow'd, I know, to be written both ways very beautifully : But since Terror and Pity are laid down for the Ends of Tragedy by the great Master and Father of Criticism, I was always inclin'd to fancy, that the last and remaining Impressions, which ought to be left on the Minds of an Audience, should proceed from one of these two. They should be struck with Terror in several parts of the Play, but always conclude and go away with Pity ; a sort of Regret proceeding from Good nature, which, tho an uneasiness, is not always disagreeable to the Person who feels it. It was this Passion that the famous Mr. *Otway* succeeded so well in touching, and must and will at all times affect People, who have any Tenderness or Humanity. If therefore I had sav'd *Artaxerxes* and *Amestris*, I believe (with submission to my Judges) I had destroy'd the greatest occasion for Compassion in the whole Play. Any body may perceive, that she is rais'd to some degrees of Happiness, by hearing that her Father and Husband are living, (whom she had suppos'd dead) and by seeing the Enemy and Persecutor of her Family dying at her Feet, purposefully, that the turn of her Death may be more surprizing and pitiful. As for that part of the Objection, which says, that innocent Persons ought not to be shewn unfortunate ; the Success and general Approbation, which many of the best Tragedies that have been writ, and

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which were built on that Foundation, have met with, will be a sufficient Answer for me.

That which they call the Poetical Justice, is, I think, strictly observ'd; the two principal Contrivers of Evil, the Statesman and Priest, are punish'd with death, and the Queen is depos'd from her Authority by her own Son; which, I suppose, will be allow'd as the severest Mortification that could happen to a Woman of her imperious Temper.

If there can be any excuse for my entertaining your Lordship with this detail of Criticisms, it is, That I would have this first Mark of the Honour I have for your Lordship appear with as few faults as possible. Did not the prevailing Character of your Lordship's excellent Humanity and Good-nature encourage me, what ought I not to fear from the Niceness of your Taste and Judgment? The Delicacy of your Reflections may be very fatal to so rough a Draught as this is; but if I will believe (as I am sure I ought to do) all Men that I have heard speak of your Lordship, they bid me hope every thing from your Goodness. This is that I must sincerely own, which made me extremely ambitious of your Lordship's Patronage for this Piece. I am but too sensible that there are a Multitude of Faults in it; but since the Good-nature of the Town has cover'd, or not taken notice of 'em, I must have so much discretion, as not to look with an affected Nicety into 'em my self. With all the Faults and Imperfections which it may have, I must own, I shall be yet very well satisfy'd with it, if it gives me an Opportunity of reckoning my self from this time,

Your Lordship's most Obedient

and devoted Humble Servant,



N. ROWE.

PRO-



PROLOGUE,

Spoken by Mr. Betterton.



F dying Lovers yet deserve a Tear,
 If a sad Story of a Maid's Despair,
 Yet move Compassion in the pitying Fair ;
 This Day the Poet does his Art employ,
 The soft Accesses of your Souls to try.
 Nor let the Stoick boast his Mind unmov'd ;
 The Brute Philosopher, who ne'er has prov'd
 The Joy of Loving or of being Lov'd ;
 Who scorns his Human Nature to confess,
 And striving to be more than Man, is less.
 Nor let the Men the weeping Fair accuse,
 Those kind Protectors of the Tragick Muse,
 Whose Tears did moving Otway's Labours crown,
 And made the poor Monimia's Grief their own :
 Those Tears, their Art, not Weakness has confest,
 Their Grief approv'd the Niceness of their Taste,
 And they wept most, because they judg'd the best.
 O could this Age's Writers hope to find
 An Audience to Compassion thus inclin'd,
 The Stage would need no Farce, nor Song, nor Dance,
 Nor Capering Monsieur brought from active France.
 Clinch and his Organ-Pipe, his Dogs and Bear,
 To native Barnet might again repair,
 Or breathe with Captain Otter Bankside Air :
 Majestick Tragedy should once agen
 In Purple Pomp adorn the swelling Scene.

Her.

Her Search should ransack all the Antients Store,
 The Fortunes of their Loves and Arms explore,
 Such as might grieve you, but shou'd please you more.
 What Shakespear durst not, this bold Age shou'd do,
 And famous Greek and Latin Beauties shew.
 Shakespear, whose Genius to it self a Law,
 Could Men in every Height of Nature draw,
 And copy'd all but Women that he saw.
 Those antient Heroines your Concern shou'd move,
 Their Grief and Anger much, but most their Love;
 For in the Account of every Age we find
 The best and fairest of that Sex were kind,
 To Pity always and to Love inclin'd.
 Assert, ye Fair-ones, who in Judgment sit,
 Your antient Empire over Love and Wit;
 Reform our Sense, and teach the Men t' obey;
 They'll leave their Tumbling if you lead the way.
 Be but what those before to Quay were;
 O were you but as kind, we know you are as fair.



EPILOGUE,

Spoken by Mrs. Bracegirdle.

THE Spleen and Vapours, and this doleful Play,
 Have mortify'd me to that Height to-day,
 That I am almost in the mortal Mind
 To die indeed, and leave you all behind.
 Know then, since I resolve in peace to part,
 I mean to leave to one alone my Heart.
 (Last Favours will admit of no Partage,
 I bar all Sharing, but upon the Stage.)

To one who can with one alone be blest,
 The peaceful Monarch of a single Breast.
 To one ——— but oh ! how hard 'twill be to find
 That Phoenix in your fickle changing Kind !
 New Loves, new Interests, and Religions new,
 Still your Fantastick Appetites pursue.
 Your sickly Fancies loath what you possess,
 And every restless Fool would change his Place.
 Some weary of their Peace and Quiet grown,
 Want to be hoisted up aloft, and shown ;
 Whilst from the envy'd Height, the Wise get safely down. }
 We find your wavering Temper to our Cost,
 Since all our Pains and Care to please is lost.
 Musick in vain supports with friendly Aid
 Her Sister Poetry's declining Head :
 Show but a Mimick Ape, or French Buffoon,
 You to the other House in Shoals are gone,
 And leave us here to tune our Crowds alone. }
 Must Shakespear, Fletcher, and laborious Ben
 Be left for Scaramouch and Harlequin ?
 Allow you are unconstant, yet 'tis strange,
 For Sense is still the same, and ne'er can change :
 Yet even in that you vary as the rest,
 And every day new Notions are profess'd.
 Nay there's a Wit has found, as I am told,
 New Ways to Heaven, despairing of the old :
 He swears he'll spoil the Clerk's and Sexton's Trade,
 Bells shall no more be rung, nor Graves be made ;
 The Hearse and Six no longer be in fashion,
 Since all the Faithful may expect Translation.
 What think you of the Project ? I'm for trying,
 I'll lay aside these foolish Thoughts of dying ;
 Preserve my Youth and Vigour for the Stage,
 And be translated in a good old Age.

Dra-

Dramatis Personæ.

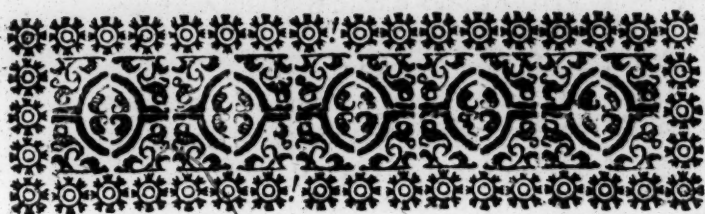
M E N.

Artaxerxes, Prince of Persia, Eldest Son to the King Arsaces, by a former Queen.	} Mr. Verbrugen.
Artaban, Son to Arsaces, by Artemisa.	Mr. Booth.
Memnon, Formerly General to Arsaces, now disgrac'd; a Friend to Artaxerxes.	} Mr. Betterton.
Mirza, First Minister of State, in the Interest of Artemisa and Artaban.	} Mr. Freeman.
Magas, Priest of the Sun, Friend to Mirza and the Queen.	} Mr. Bowman.
Cleanthes, Friend to Artaban.	Mr. Pack.
Orchanes, Captain of the Guards to the Queen.	} Mr. Bailly.

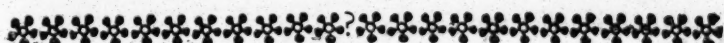
W O M E N.

Artemisa, Formerly the Wife of Tiri- basus a Persian Lord, now married to the King, and Queen of Persia.	} Mrs. Barry.
Amestris, Daughter to Memnon, in love with, and belov'd by Artax- erxes.	} Mrs. Bracegirdle.
Cleone, Daughter to Mirza, in love with Artaxerxes, and belov'd by Artaban.	} Mrs. Bowman.
Beliza, Confident to Cleone.	Mrs. Martin.

T H E




THE
Ambitious STEP-MOTHER.



ACT I.

SCENE I. *A Royal Palace.*

Enter at several Doors Mirza and Magas.

Mir.  HAT bring'st thou, *Magas*? Say, how
fares the King?

Mag. As one, whom when we number
with the Living,

We say the most we can; tho sure it must
Be happier far, to quit a wretched Being,
Than keep it on such Terms: For as I enter'd
The Royal Lodging, an universal Horror
Struck thro my Eyes, and chill'd my very Heart;
The chearful Day was every where shut out
With care, and left a more than midnight Darkness,
Such as might ev'n be felt: A few dim Lamps,
That feebly lifted up their sickly Heads,
Look'd faintly thro the Shade, and made it seem

More

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More dismal by such Light ; while those that waited,
In solemn Sorrow, mix'd with wild Amazement,
Observ'd a dreadful Silence.

Mirz. Didst thou see him ?

Mag. My Lord, I did ; treading with gentle steps,
I reach'd the Bed, which held the poor Remains
Of great *Arfaces* : just as I approach'd,
His drooping Lids, that seem'd for ever clos'd,
Were faintly rear'd, to tell me that he liv'd :
The Balls of Sight, dim and depriv'd of Motion,
Sparkled no more with that Majestick Fire,
At which ev'n Kings have trembled ; but had lost
Their common useful Office, and were shaded
With an eternal Night. Struck with a sight,
That shew'd me Human Nature fall'n so low,
I hastily retir'd.

Mirz. He dies too soon ;
And Fate, if possible, must be delay'd ;
The Thought that labours in my forming Brain,
Yet crude and immature demands more time.
Have the Physicians giv'n up all their hopes ?
Cannot they add a few days to a Monarch,
In recompence of thousand vulgar Fates,
Which their Drugs daily hasten ?

Mag. As I pass
The outward Rooms, I found 'em in Consult ;
I ask'd 'em if their Art was at a stand,
And could not help the King ; they shook their Heads,
And in most grave and solemn wise unfolded
Matter, which little purported, but words
Rank'd in right learned Phrase ; all I could learn, was,
That Nature's kindly Warmth was quite extinct,
Nor could the Breath of Art kindle again
Th' Etherial Fire.

Mirz. My Royal Mistress *Artemisa's* Fate,
And all her Son young *Artaban's* high Hopes,
Hang on this lucky Crisis ; since this day,
The haughty *Artaxerxes* and old *Memnon*
Enter *Persopolis* : The yearly Feast
Devoted to our glorious God the Sun.



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Hides their Designs under a holy Veil ;
And thus Religion is a Mask for Faction,
But let their Guardian *Genii* still be watchful,
For if they chance to nod, my waking Vengeance
Shall surely catch that Moment to destroy 'em.

Mag. 'Tis said the fair *Amestris*, *Memnon's* Daughter,
Comes in their Company.

Mirz. That fatal Beauty,
With most malignant Influence, has crost
My first and great Ambition. When my Brother,
The great *Cleander* fell by *Memnon's* hand,
(You know the Story of our Houses quarrel)
I sought the King for Justice on the Murderer ;
And to confirm my Interest in the Court,
In confidence of mighty Wealth and Power,
A long Descent from noble Ancestors,
And somewhat of the Beauty of the Maid,
I offer'd my *Cleone* to the Prince,
Fierce *Artaxerxes* : he, with rude disdain,
Refus'd the proffer ; and to grate me more,
Publickly own'd his Passion for *Amestris* :
And in despite ev'n of his Father's Justice,
Espous'd the Cause of *Memnon*.

Mag. Ev'n from that noted *Æra*, I remember
You dated all your Service to the Queen,
Our common Mistress.

Mirz. 'Tis true, I did so : Nor was it in vain ;
She did me right, and satisfy'd my Vengeance ;
Memnon was banish'd, and the Prince disgrac'd
Went into Exile with him. Since that time,
Since I have been admitted into her Council,
And have seen her, with unerring Judgment, guide
The Reins of Empire, I have been amaz'd,
To see her more than manly Strength of Soul,
Cautious in good Success, in bad unshaken ;
Still arm'd against the uncertain Turns of Chance,
Untoucht by any Weakness of her Sex,
Their Superstition, Pity, or their Fear ;
And is a Woman only in her Cunning.
What Story tells of great *Semiramis*,

B

Or

' 14 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Or rolling Time, that gathers as it goes,
Has added more, such *Artemisa* is.

Mag. Sure 'twas a mark of an uncommon Genius,
To bend a Soul like that of great *Arfaces*,
And charm him to her sway.

Mirz. Certainly Fate,
Or somewhat like the Force of Fate, was in it ;
And still whene'er Remembrance sets that Scene
Before my eyes, I view it with Amazement.

Mag. I then was young, a stranger to the Court,
And only took the Story as reported
By different Fame, you must have known it better.

Mirz. Indeed I did, then favour'd by the King,
And by that means a sharer in the Secret.
'Twas on a day of publick Festival,
When beauteous *Artemisa* stood to view,
Behind the Covert of a golden Lattice,
When King and Court returning from the Temple ;
When just as by her Stand *Arfaces* past,
The Windows, by design or chance, fell down,
And to his view expos'd her blushing Beauties.
She seem'd surpriz'd, and presently withdrew,
But ev'n that Moment was an Age in Love :
So was the Monarch's Heart for Passion moulded,
So apt to take at first the soft Impression.
Soon as we were alone, I found the Evil
Already past a Remedy, and vainly
Urg'd the Resentment of her injur'd Lord :
His Love was deaf to all.

Mag. Was *Tiribasus* absent ?

Mir. He was then General of the Horse,
Under old *Memnon* in the *Median* War.
But if that distant View so much had charm'd him,
Imagine how he burnt, when, by my means,
He view'd her Beauties nearer, when each Action,
And every graceful Sound conspir'd to charm him :
Joy of her Conquest, and the Hopes of Greatness,
Gave Lustre to her Charms, and made her seem
Of more than mortal Excellence. In short,
After some faint resistance, like a Bride

That

That strives a while, tho eager for the Bliss,
The furious King enjoy'd her :
And to secure their Joys, a snare was laid
For her unthinking Lord, in which he fell
Before the fame of this could reach his Ears.
Since that, she still has by successful Arts
Maintain'd that Power which first her Beauty gain'd.

Mag. With deepest Foresight, wisely has she laid
A sure Foundation of the future Greatness
Of *Artaban*, her only darling Son.
Each busy Thought, that rolls within her Breast,
Labours for him : The King, when first he sicken'd,
Declar'd he should succeed him in the Throne.

Mir. That was a Point well gain'd ; nor were the
Eldership
Of *Artaxerxes* worth our least of fears,
If *Memnon's* Interest did not prop his Cause.
Since then they stand secur'd, by being join'd,
From reach of open Force, it were a Master-piece
Worthy a thinking Head, to sow Division
And Seeds of Jealousy, to loose those Bonds,
Which knit and hold 'em up ; that so divided,
With ease they might be ruin'd.

Mag. That's a difficulty next to impossible.

Mir. Cease to think so.
The Wise and Active conquer Difficultes,
By daring to attempt 'em : Sloth and Folly
Shiver and shrink at sight of Toil and Hazard,
And make th' Impossibility they fear ;
Ev'n *Memnon's* Temper seems to give th' occasion ;
Of Wrong impatient, headlong to revenge ;
Tho bold, yet wants that Faculty of thinking,
That should direct his Anger. Valiant Fools
Were made by Nature for the Wise to work with ;
They are their Tools, and 'tis the Sport of Statesmen,
When Heroes knock their knotty Heads together,
And fall by one another.

Mag. What you've said,
Has wak'd a Thought in me which may be lucky :
E'er hewas banish'd for your Brother's Murder,

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There was a Friendship 'twixt us ; and tho then
I left his barren Soil, to root my self
More safely under your auspicious Shade,
Yet still pretending Tyes of antient Love,
At his Arrival here I'll visit him :
Whence this Advantage may at least be made,
To ford his shallow Soul.

Mirz. Oh much, much more ;
'Twas happily remembred, nothing gulls
These open unsuspecting Fools, like Friendship ;
Dull heavy Things ! Whom Nature has left honest
In mere frugality, to save the Charge
She's at in setting out a thinking Soul :
Who, since their own short Understandings reach
No further than the present, think ev'n the Wife,
Like them, disclose the Secrets of their Breasts,
Speak what they think, and tell Tales of themselves.
Thy Function too will varnish o'er our Arts,
And sanctify Dissembling.

Mag. Yet still I doubt,
His Caution may draw back, and fear a Snare.

Mirz. Tell him, the better to assist the Fraud,
That ev'n I wish his Friendship, and would gladly
Forget that Cause of Hate, which long has held us
At moral distance, give up my Revenge,
A grateful Offering to the publick Peace.

Mag. Could you afford him such a Bribe as that,
A Brother's Blood yet unaton'd ———

Mirz. No, *Magas*,
It is not in the power of Fate to raze
That Thought from out my Memory :
Eternal Night, 'tis true, may cast a Shade
On all my Faculties, extinguish Knowledge,
And great Revenge may with my Being cease ;
But while I am, that ever will remain,
And in my latest Spirits still survive.
Yet, I would have thee promise that, and more,
The Friendship of the Queen, the Restitution
Of his Command, and Honours, that his Daughter
Shall be the Bride of *Artaban* ; say any thing :

Thou

The Ambitious Step-Mother. 17

Thou know'st the Faith of Courtiers, and their Oaths ;
Like those of Lovers, the Gods laugh at 'em.

Mag. Doubt not my Zeal to serve your Royal Mistress,
And in her Interest yours, my Friend and Patron.

Mirz. My worthy Priest ! Still be my Friend, and share
The utmost of my Power, by Greatness rais'd.

[*Embracing.*

Thou like the God thou serv'st, shall shine aloft,
And with thy Influence rule the under World.
But see ! the Queen appears ; she seems to muse,
Her thoughtful Soul labours with some Event
Of high Import, which bustles like an Embryo
In its dark Room, and longs to be disclos'd.
Retire, lest we disturb her.

[*They retire to the Side of the Stage.*

Enter the Queen attended.

Qu. Be fix'd, my Soul, fix'd on thy own firm Basis !
Be constant to thy self ; nor know the Weakness,
The poor Irresolution of my Sex :
Disdain those Shews of Danger, that would bar
My Way to Glory. Ye diviner Pow'rs !
By whom 'tis said we are, from whose bright Beings
Those active Sparks were struck which move our Clay ;
I feel, and I confess the Ethereal Energy,
That busy restless Principle, whose Appetite
Is only pleas'd with Greatness like your own :
Why have you clogg'd it then with this dull Mass,
And shut it up in Woman ? Why debas'd it
To an inferior Part of the Creation ?
Since your own heavenly Hands mistook my Lot,
'Tis you have err'd, not I. Could Fate e'er mean
Me for a Wife, a Slave to *Tiribasus* !
To such a thing as he ! a Wretch ! a Husband !
Therefore in just Assertion of my self,
I shook him off, and pass'd those narrow Limits,
Which Laws contrive in vain for Souls born great.
There is not, must not be a Bound for Greatness ;
Power gives a Sanction, and makes all things just.

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Ha! *Mirza*! Worthy Lord! I saw thee not,
[*Seeing Mirza.*

So busy were my Faculties in Thought.

Mirz. The Thoughts of Princes dwell in sacred Privacy,
Unknown and venerable to the Vulgar; [*Bowing.*
And like a Temple's innermost Recesses,
None enters to behold the hallow'd Mysteries,
Unbidden of the God that dwells within.

Qu. *Wife Mirza!* were my Soul a Temple, fit
For Gods and Godlike Counsels to inhabit,
Thee only would I chuse of all Mankind,
To be the Priest, still favour'd with access;
Whose piercing Wit, sway'd by unerring Judgment,
Might mingle ev'n with assembled Gods,
When they devise unchangeable Decrees,
And call 'em Fate.

Mirz. Whate'er I am, each Faculty,
The utmost Power of my exerted Soul,
Preserves a Being only for your Service;
And when I am not yours, I am no more.

Qu. Time shall not know an End of 'my Acknowledgments.

But every Day of our continu'd Lives
Be witness of my Gratitude, to draw
The Knot, which holds our common Interest, closer:
Within six Days, my Son, my *Artaban*,
Equally dear to me as Life and Glory,
In publick shall espouse the fair *Cleone*,
And be my Pledge of everlasting Amity.

Mirz. O Royal Lady! you out-bid my Service;
And all Returns are vile, but Words the poorest.

Qu. Enough! be as thou hast been, still my Friend,
I ask no more. But I observe of late,
Your Daughter grows a Stranger to the Court;
Know you the Cause?

Mirz. A melancholy Girl:
Such in her Infancy her Temper was,
Soft even beyond her Sex's Tenderness;
By Nature pitiful, and apt to grieve
For the Mishaps of others, and so make

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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The Sorrows of the wretched World her own :
Her Closet and the Gods share all her time,
Except when (only by some Maid attended)
She seeks some shady solitary Grove,
Or by the gentle Murmurs of some Brook
Sits sadly listning to a Tale of Sorrow,
Till with her Tears she swell the narrow Stream.

Qu. It is not well, these Thoughts must be remov'd :
That eating Canker, Grief, with wastful Spite,
Preys on the rosy Bloom of Youth and Beauty :
But Love shall chase away these Clouds of Sadness ;
My Son shall breathe so warm a Gale of Sighs,
As shall dissolve those Icicles, that hang
Like Death about her Heart.

Attend us, holy *Magas*, to the King,
Nor cease to importune the mighty Gods
To grant him Health, tho much I fear in vain.

[*Exit Queen, Magas, and Attendants.*

Manet Mirza.

Mirz. This meddling Priest longs to be found a Fool ;
Thinks he that *Memnon*, Soldier as he is,
Thoughtless and dull, will listen to his Soothing ?
Howe'er, I gave his wise Proposal way,
Nay, urg'd him to go on ; the shallow Fraud
Will ruin him for ever with my Enemies,
And make him firmly mine, spite of his Fears,
And natural Inconstancy.
While Choice remains he will be still unsteddy,
And nothing but Necessity can fix him.

[*Exit.*

Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Attendants.

Artax. Methinks, my noble Father and my Friend,
We enter here like Strangers, and unlook'd for :
Each busy Face we meet, with Wonder starts,
And seems amaz'd to see us.

Mem. Well may th' ignoble Herd
Start, if with heedless Steps they unawares

Tread

20 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Tread on the Lion's Walk ; a Prince's Genius
 Awes with supiner Greatness all beneath him.
 With Wonder they behold the great *Arfaces*
 Reviv'd again in Godlike *Artaxerxes*.
 In you they see him, such as oft they did
 Returning from his Wars, and crown'd with Conquest,
 When all our Virgins met him on the way,
 And with their Songs and Dances blest his Triumph :
 Now basely aw'd by factious Priests and Women,
 They start at Majesty, and seem surpriz'd,
 As if a God had met 'em. In Honour's Name,
 Why have we let this be ? Why have we languish'd ?
 And suffer'd such a Government as this
 To waste our Strength, and wear our Empire low ?

Artax. Curst be the Means by which these Ills arose,
 Fatal alike to me as to my Country ;
 Which my great Soul, unable to revenge,
 Has yet with Indignation only seen,
 Cut off by Arts of Coward Priests and Statesmen,
 Whom I disdain'd with servile Smiles to court,
 From the great Right which God and Nature gave,
 My Birthright to a Throne.

Mem. Nor Priests, nor Statesmen,
 Could have compleated such an Ill as that,
 If Woman had not mingled in the Mischief ;
 If *Artemisa* had not, by her Charms,
 And all her Sex's Cunning, wrought the King,
 Old, obvious to her Arts, decay'd in Greatness,
 Dead to the Memory of what once he was,
 Just crawling on the Verge of wretched Life,—
 A Burden to himself, and his Friends Pity,
 Among his other Failings, to forget
 All that a Father and a King could owe
 To such a Son as you were ; to cut you off
 From your Succession, from your Hopes of Empire,
 And graft her upstart Offspring on to Royalty.

Artax. But if I bear it,
 Oh may I live to be my Brother's Slave,
 The Scorn of those brave Friends that own my Cause ;
 May you, my Father spurn me for a Coward,

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

21

May all my noble Hopes of Love and Glory
Leave me to vile Despair. By Heaven, my Heart
Sits lighter in my Bosom, when I think
That I this day shall meet the Boy my Brother,
Whose young Ambition with aspiring Wings
Dares ev'n to mate my Greatness.

Mem. Fame, that speaks
Minutely every Circumstance of Princes,
Describes him bold, and fiercely fond of Power,
Which ev'n in spite of Nature he affects :
Impatient of Command, and hardly deigning
To be controll'd by his imperious Mother.
'Tis said too (as no means were left untry'd,
Which might prepare and fit him to contend
With a superior Right of Birth and Merit)
That Books, and the politer Arts, (which those
Who know admire) have been his Care ; already
He mingles in their Councils, and they trust
His Youth with Secrets of important Villany.
The Crowd, taught by his Creatures to admire him,
Stile him a God in Wisdom.

Artax. Be that his Glory :
Let him with Pedants hunt for Praise in Books,
Pore out his Life amongst the lazy Gown-men,
Grow old and vainly proud in fancy'd Knowledge,
Unequal to the Task of vast Ambition :
Ambition ! the Desire of active Souls,
That pushes 'em beyond the Bounds of Nature
And elevates the Hero to the Gods.
But see ! my Love, your beauteous Daughter comes,
And ev'n Ambition sickens at her sight.

Enter Amestris attended.

Revenge, and fierce Desires of Glory, cease
To urge my Passions, master'd by her Eyes ;
And only gentle Fires now warm my Breast.

Amest. I come, my Father, to attend your Order.

[To Memnon.

Mem. 'Tis well ; and I would have thee still be near me.
The

22 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

The Malice of the Faction which I hate,
Would vent it self ev'n on thy Innocence,
Wert thou not safe under a Father's Care.

Artax. Oh say a Lover's too ; nor can you have
An Interest in her Safety more than mine.
Love gives a Right superior ev'n to Nature ;
Or Love is Nature, in the noblest meaning,
The Cause and the Preserver of the World.
These Arms that long to press thee to my Bosom,
For ever shall defend thee.

Mem. Therefore, my Son,
Unto your Care I leave our common Charge ;
Tigranes with our Friends expects my Orders :
Those when I have dispatch'd, upon the Instant
I will return, and meet at your Apartment. [*Exit Mem.*]

Artax. Come to my Arms, and let me hide thee there
From all those Fears that vex thy beating Heart,
Be safe and free from all those fancy'd Dangers,
That haunt thy Apprehension.

Ames. Can you blame me,
If from Retirement drawn, and pleasing Solitude,
I fear to tempt this stormy Sea the World,
Whose ev'ry Beach is strew'd with Wrecks of Wretches
That daily perish in it ? Curst Ambition !
Why dost thou come to trouble my repose,
Who have ev'n from my Infancy disclaim'd thee ?

Artax. Cease to complain, my Love, and let no Thought
But what brings Peace and Joy approach thy Breast.
Let me impart my manly Fires to thee,
To warm thy Fancy to a Taste of Glory ;
Imperial Power and Purple Greatness wait thee,
And sue for thy Acceptance : by the Sun,
And by *Arfaces'* Head, I will not mount
The Throne of *Cyrus*, but to share it with thee.

Ames. Vain Shews of Happiness ! Deceitful Pageantry !
Ah ! Prince, hadst thou but known the Joys which dwell
With humbler Fortunes, thou wouldst curse thy Royalty.
Had Fate allotted us some obscure Village,
Where only blest with Life's Necessities,
We might have pass'd in Peace our happy Days,

The Ambitious Step-Mother. 23

Free from the Cares which Crowns and Empires bring ;
There no Step-Mother, no Ambitious Brother,
No wicked Statesmen, would with impious Arts
Have strove to wrest from us our small Inheritance,
Or stir the simple Hinds to noisy Faction :
Our Nights had all been blest with balmy Slumbers,
And all our waking Hours been crown'd with Love.

Art. Exquisite Charmer ! now by *Orosmades*
I swear, thy each soft Accent melts my Soul :
The Joy of Conquest, and immortal Triumph,
Honour and Greatness, all that fires the Hero
To high Exploits, and everlasting Fame,
Grows vile in sight of thee. My haughty Soul,
By Nature fierce, and panting after Glory,
Could be content to live obscure with thee,
Forgotten and unknown of all but my *Amestris*.

Amesf. No, Son of great *Arfaces*, tho my Soul
Shares in my Sex's Weakness, and would fly
From Noise and Faction, and from fatal Greatness,
Yet for thy sake, thou Idol of my Heart,
(Nor will I blush to own the sacred Flame,
Thy Sighs and Vows have kindled in my Breast)
For thy lov'd sake, spite of my boding Fears,
I'll meet the Danger which Ambition brings,
And tread one Path with thee : Nor shalt thou lose
The glorious Portion which thy Fate designs thee,
For thy *Amestris*' Fears.

Art. Give me those Fears ;
For all things will be well.

Amesf. Grant it, ye Powers :
This Day before your Altars will I kneel,
Where all my Vows shall for my Prince be offer'd ;
Still let Success attend him, let Mankind
Adore in him your visible Divinity ;
Nor will I importune you for my self,
But sum up all I ask in *Artaxerxes*.

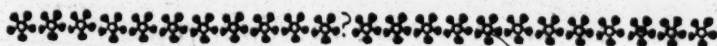
Art. And doubt not but the Gods will kindly hear
Their Virgin Votary, and grant her Pray'r ;
Our glorious Sun, the Source of Light and Heat,
Whose Influence cheers the World he did create,

Shall

24 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Shall smile on thee from his Meridian Skies,
And own the kindred Beauties of thy Eyes ;
Thy Eyes, which, could his own fair Beams decay,
Might shine for him, and bless the World with Day.


[*Exeunt.*



A C T II.

SCENE I. *An Apartment of the Palace.*

Enter Memnon and Magas.

Mem.  HOSE who are wise in Courts, my holy
Sir,
Make Friendships with the Ministers of
State,

Nor seek the Ruins of a wretched Exile,
Lest there should be Contagion in Misfortunes,
And make the Alliance fatal.

Mag. Friends like *Memnon*
Are worth being sought in Danger : Since this Age,
Of most flagitious Note, degenerates
From the fam'd Vertue of our Ancestors,
And leaves but few Examples of their Excellence,
Whom should we seek for Friendships but those few,
Those happy few, within whose Breasts alone
The Footsteps of lost Vertue yet remain ?

Mem. I prithee Peace ! for nothing misbecomes
The Man that would be thought a Friend, like Flattery :
Flattery ! the meanest kind of base dissembling,
And only us'd to catch the grossest Fools :
Besides, it stains the Honour of thy Function,
Which, like the Gods thou serv'st, should be sincere.

Mag. By that Sincerity, by all the Service
My Friendship can express, I would approve it ;

And

And tho I went not from *Persepolis*
Companion of your Exile, yet my Heart
Was with you still ; and what I could I did,
Beseeching ev'ry God for your Return :
Nor were those Vows in vain, since once again
'Tis given me to behold my Friend ; nay more,
Would you agree, to keep you here for ever.

Mem. The Gods, 'tis true, are just, and have, I hope
At length decreed an end of my Misfortunes ;
At least they give me this, to die with Honour,
When Life grows vile or burdensome.

Mag. By me they offer all that you can ask,
And point an easy way to Happiness.
Spare then the Wounds our wretched Country fears,
The thousand Ills which Civil Discord brings.
Oh still that Noise of War, whose dread Alarms
Frighten Repose from Country Villages,
And stir rude Tumult up, and wild Distraction
In all our peaceful Cities.

Mem. Witness for me,
Ye awful Gods, who view our inmost Thoughts !
I took not Arms, till urg'd by Self-defence,
The eldest Law of Nature.
Impute not then those Ills which may ensue
To me, but those who with incessant Hate
Pursue my Life, whose Malice spreads the Flame
To every Part, that my devoted Fabrick
May in the universal Ruin burn.

Mag. And yet ev'n there perhaps you judge too rashly ;
Impetuous Passion hurries you so fast,
You cannot mark the Advantage of your Fortune.

Mem. Has not the Law been urg'd to set a Brand
Of foul Dishonour on my hoary Head ?
Ha ! Am I not proscib'd ?

Mag. Forget that Thought,
That jarring grates your Soul, and turns the Harmony
Of blessed Peace to cruel infernal Discord.
Hate and its fatal Causes all shall cease,
And *Memnon's* Name be honour'd as of old,

26 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

The bravest and the most successful Warrior,
The fortunate Defender of his Country.

Mem. 'Tis true, (nor will it seem a Boast to own)
I have fought well for *Persia*, and repay'd
The Benefit of Birth with honest Service ;
Full fifty Years harness'd in rugged Steel,
I have endur'd the biting Winter's Blast,
And the severer Heats of parching Summer ;
While they who loll'd at home on lazy Couches
Amidst a Crew of Harlots and soft Eunuchs,
Were at my Cost secure in Luxury :

This is a Justice *Mirza's* self must do me.

Mag. Even he, tho fatal Accidents have set
A most unhappy Bar between your Friendship,
Lamenting that there had been Cause of Enmity,
And owning all the Merit of your Vertues,
Will often with Fate had ordain'd you Friends.

Mem. Our God, the Sun, shall sooner change his
Course,
And all the Impossibilities which Poets
Count to extravagance of loose Description,
Shall sooner be.

Mag. Yet hear me, noble *Memnon* ;
When by the Duty of my Priesthood mov'd,
And in just Detestation of the Mischiefs
Intestine Jars produce, I urg'd wise *Mirza*,
By his Concurrence, Help, and healing Counsels,
To stop those Wounds at which his Country bleeds ;
Griev'd at the Thought, he vow'd his whole Endeavour
Should be to close those Breaches :
That ev'n *Cleander's* Death, and all those Quarrels
That long have nourish'd Hatred in your Houses,
Should be in Joy of publick Peace forgotten.

Mem. Oh couldst thou charm the Malice of a Statesman,
And make him quit his Purpose of Revenge,
Thy Preaching might reform the guilty World,
And Vice would be no more.

Mag. Nay, ev'n the Queen
Will bind the Confirmation by her Son,

And

The Ambitious Step-Mother. 27

And asks the fair *Amestris* for Prince *Artaban*.

Mem. Were that the only Terms, it were impossible.

Mag. You would not shun the Alliance of a Prince?

Mem. No; for it is the Glory of my Fate,
That *Artaxerxes* is design'd my Son,
With every Grace and Royal Vertue crown'd;
Great, just, and merciful, such as Mankind
(When, in the infant World, first Governments
Began by chance) would have design'd a King.

Mag. Unbounded Power, and Height of Greatness,
give
To Kings that Lustre, which we think divine;
The Wise, who know 'em, know they are but Men,
Nay, sometimes weak ones too: the Crowd indeed,
Who kneel before the Image, not the God,
Worship the Deity their Hands have made.
The Name of *Artaban* will be as great
As that of *Cyrus*, when he shall possess
(As sure he shall) his Throne.

Mem. Ha! What means he?

This Villain Priest! But hold my Rage a little,
And learn Diffimulation; I'll try him further: (*Aside.*)
You talk in Riddles, when you name a Throne,
And *Artaban*; the Gods, who portion out
The Lots of Princes as of private Men,
Have put a Bar between his Hopes and Empire.

Mag. What Bar?

Mem. The best, an elder Brother's Claim.

Mag. That's easily remov'd; the King their Father
On just and weighty Reasons has decreed
His Scepter to the younger; add to this,
The joint Concurrence of our *Persian* Lords,
Who only want your Voice to make it firm.

Mem. Can I, can they, can any honest Hand,
Join in an Act like this? Is not the Elder
By Nature pointed out for Preference?
Is not his Right inroll'd amongst those Laws
Which keep the World's vast Frame in beauteous Order?
Ask those thou nam'st but now, what made them Lords?
What Titles had they had, if Merit only

28 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Could have confer'd a Right ? if Nature had not
Srove hard to thrust the worst-deserving first,
And stamp'd the noble Mark of Eldership
Upon their baser Metal ?

Mag. Sure there may be
Reasons of so much Power and cogent Force,
As may even set aside this Right of Birth ;
If Sons have Rights, yet Fathers have 'em too.
'Twere an invidious Task to enter into
The Insolence, and other Faults, which mov'd
Royal *Asfaxes* to a just Displeasure
Against his eldest Son, Prince *Artaxerxes*.

Mem. Ha ! dare not for thy Life, I charge thee dare
not

To brand the spotless Vertue of my Prince
With Falshoods of most base and damn'd Contrivance.
I tell thee, envious Priest, should the just Gods
Require severe Account of thy past Life,
And charge Remembrance to dispose thy Crimes,
In Rank and hideous Order to thy View,
Horror and Guilt of Soul would make thee mad.

Mag. You take the Matter further than I meant it ;
My Friendship only aims at your Advantage,
Would point you out a Way to Peace and Honour,
And in return of this, your Rage unkindly
Loads me with Injuries.

Mem. Away ! I cannot bear thy base Dissembling,
My honest Soul disdains thee and thy Friendship.
How hast thou dar'd to think so vilely of me,
That I would condescend to thy mean Arts,
And traffick with thee for a Prince's Ruin ?
A Prince ! the Joy and Honour of Mankind,
As much superior to the rest of Kings,
As they themselves are above common Men ;
And is the very Image of the Gods.
Wer't thou not privileg'd, like Age and Women,
My Sword should reach thee, and revenge the Wrong
Thy Tongue has done his Fame.

Mag. Ungrateful Lord !
Would'st thou invade my Life, as a Return

For proffer'd Love ? But let th' Event declare
How great a Good by me sincerely offer'd,
Thy dull Romantick Honour has refus'd.
And since I have discharg'd the Debt I ow'd
To former Friendship, if the Gods hereafter
Send Ruin down, and plague thee with Confusion,
Remember me in vain, and curse thy Folly. [*Exit Mag.*

Mem. No, my Remembrance treasures honest
Thoughts,

And holds not things like thee ; I scorn thy Friendship,
And would not owe my Life to such a Villain :
But thou art hardly Saint enough to prophesy.
Were all thy Tribe like thee, it might well startle
Our Lay unlearned Faith, when thro such Hands
The Knowledge of the Gods is reach'd to Man.
But thus those Gods instruct us, that not all
(Who like Intruders thrust into their Service,
And turn the Holy Office to a Trade)
Participate their sacred Influence.
This then is your own Cause ; ye awful Powers,
Revenge your selves, your violated Altars,
That those who with unhallow'd Hands approach,
May tremble at your Justice. [*Exit Memnon.*

SCENE II. *The Palace.*

Enter the Queen, Artaban, Mirza, Magas, and Attendants.

Artab. My Brother then is come ?

Mirz. My Lord, I saw him,
With him old haughty *Memnon* ; as they pass'd,
With fierce Disdain they view'd the gazing Crowd,
And with dumb Pride seem'd to neglect that Worship
Which yet they wish'd to find : this way they move,
'Tis said to ask an Audience of the King.

Qu. *Mirza,* 'tis well, I thank thy timely Care ;
Here will we face this Storm of Insolence,
Nor fear the noisy Thunder, let it roll,
Then burst, and spend at once its idle Rage.

30 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Artab. Why meet we thus like wrangling Advocates,
To urge the Justice of our Cause with Words?
I hate this Parley, 'tis tame; if we must meet,
Give me my Arms, and let us stake at once
Our Rights of Merit and of Eldership,
And prove like Men our Title.

Mirz. 'Twere unsafe,
They come surrounded by a Crowd of Friends:
To strike thro' these were dangerous and rash,
Fate waits for 'em elsewhere with certain Ruin;
From Mirza's Hand expect it.

Qu. Be it so:
Auspicious Sage, I trust thee with my Fortune,
My Hopes of Greatness, do thou guide 'em all,
For me and for thy self. My Son give way,
Nor let thy hasty Youth disturb with Outrage
The present necessary Face of Peace;
Occasions great and glorious will remain
Worthy thy Arms and Courage.

Artab. I obey;
And willingly resign th' unmanly Task.
Words are indeed your Province.

Mirz. My Royal Mistress,
Prepare to meet with more than brutal Fury
From the fierce Prince and *Memnon*.

Qu. Well I know
The Insolence and native Pride of each,
With scurrile Taunts and blackest Infamy
They load my Name: But let the Wretches rail,
A Woman's Vengeance waits 'em.

Mirz. They are here.

Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Attendants.

Artax. Ye tutelar Gods, who guard this Royal Fabrick,
And thou, O *Orosmales*, the Protector
Of the great *Persian* Race, e'er yet my Father,
Royal *Arfaces*, mingle with your Godheads,
Grant me once more to lay before his Feet
His Eldest-born, his once lov'd *Artaxerxes*,

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

31

To offer my Obedience to his Age ;
All that a Son can owe to such a Father.
You, who with haggard Eyes stare wildly on me,
If (as by your Attendance here you seem)
You serve the King my Father, lead me to him.

Qu. And dost thou wonder that Mankind should start,
When Parricides and Rebels, in despite
Of Nature, Majesty, and Reverend Age,
With impious Force and ruffian Violence,
Would rob a King and Father of his Life ;
Cut off his short Remains——

Artax. Ha ! say'st thou, Woman ;
I prithee Peace, and urge not a Reply,
I would not hold Acquaintance with thy Infamy.

Qu. Ye righteous Powers, whose Justice awes the
World,

Let not your Thunders sleep when Crimes like these
Stalk in the open Air.

Artax. Thy Priest instructs thee,
Else sure thou hadst not dar'd to tempt the Gods,
And trifle with their Justice : Canst thou name it,
And look on me ? on me, whom thy curst Arts
Have strove to bar from native Right to Empire,
Made me a Stranger to a Father's Love,
And broke the Bands of Nature, which once held me
The nearest to his Heart.

Qu. Had he not reason,
When thou with Rebel Insolence didst dare
To own and to protect that hoary Ruffian ;

[*Pointing to Memnon.*

And in despite e'en of thy Father's Justice,
To stir the factious Rabble up to Arms
For him ; and make a Murderer's Cause thy own. (me,

Mem. I had another Name (nor shouldst thou move
Insulting Queen, to words, did not Remembrance
With Horror sting my Soul for *Tiribasus*,
Thy murder'd *Tiribasus*) when by my fatal Orders,
And by his own high Courage urg'd, he fell,
To make thy way to guilty Greatness easy.
I thought him then a Traytor (for thy Arts

Had

Had taught the Royal Mandate so to call him)
 Too big for publick Justice, and on that Pretence
 Consented to the Snare that catch'd his Life ;
 So my obedient Honesty was made
 The Pander to thy Lust and black Ambition.
 Except the Guilt of that accursed Day,
 In all my Iron Years of Wars and Danger,
 From blooming Youth down to decaying Age,
 My Fame ne'er knew a Stain of foul Dishonour ;
 And if that make me guilty, think what thou art,
 The Cause and the Contriver of that Mischief.

Qu. What, nam'st thou *Tiribafus* ! be his Guilt
 Forgotten with his Memory. Think on *Cleander*,
 And let the Furies that inquire for Blood,
 Stir Horror up, and bitterest Remorse,
 To gnaw thy anxious Soul. Oh great *Cleander* !
 Unworthy was thy Fate, thou first of Warriors,
 To fall beneath a base Assassin's Stab,
 Whom all the thirsty Instruments of Death
 Had in the Field of Battel fought in vain.

Mem. In sight of Heaven, and of the equal Gods,
 I will avow that my Revenge was just ;
 My injur'd Honour could not ask for less :
 Since he refus'd to do a Soldier's Justice,
 I us'd him as I ought.

Qu. Amazing Boldness !
 And dar'st thou call that Act a Soldier's Justice ?
 Didst thou not meet him with dissembled Friendship,
 Hiding the Rancour of thy Heart in Smiles ;
 When he (whose open unsuspecting Nature
 Thought thee a Soldier honest as himself)
 Came to the Banquet as secure of Peace,
 By mutual Vows renew'd ; and in the Revel
 Of that luxurious Day, forgetting Hate,
 And every Cause of antient Animosity,
 Devoted all his Thoughts to Mirth and Friendship :
 Then *Memnon* (at an Hour when few are Villains,
 The sprightly Juice infusing gentler Thoughts,
 And kindling Love ev'n in the coldest Breasts)
 Unequal to him in the Face of War,

Stole on *Cleander* with a Coward's Malice,
And struck him to the Heart.

Mem. By the stern God,
By *Mars*, the Patron of my honour'd Wars,
'Tis basely false. In his own drunken Brawl
The Boaster fell. I bore his lavish Tongue,
Nor thought him worth my Sword, till (his cold Temper
Warm'd with the Wine) he dar'd me to the Combat ;
Then pleas'd to meet him in that Fit of Valour,
I took him at his Word, and (with my Sword
Drawn against his in equal Opposition)
I kill'd him while it lasted.

Artax. Cease we, my Friend,
This Women's War of railing ; when they talk,
Men should be still, and let Noise tire it self.
I came to find a Father, tho my Fears
Suggest the worst of Evils to my Thoughts,
And make me dread to hear *Arfaces'* Fate :
Lead, *Memnon*, to the Presence.

Qu. Prince, you pass not ;
Guards keep the Door ; the King your Father lives—

Artax. Ha !——if he lives, why lives he not to me ?
Why am I thus shut out and banish'd from him ?
Why are my Veins rich with his Royal Blood ?
Why did he give me Life, if not to serve him ?
Forbid me not to wait upon his Bed,
And watch his sickly Slumbers, that my Youth
May with its Service glad his drooping Age,
And his cold Hand may bless me e'er he die.
Nay, be a Queen, and rob me of his Crown,
But let me keep my Right to filial Piety.

Qu. Well hast thou urg'd the specious Name of Duty
To hide deform'd Rebellion : Hast thou not
With thy false Arts poison'd his People's Loyalty ?
What meant thy pompous Progress thro the Empire ?
Thy vast Profusion to the factious Nobles,
Whose Interest sways the Crowd, and stirs up Mutiny ?
Why did thy haughty, fierce, disdainful Soul
Stoop to the meanest Arts which catch the Vulgar ?
Herd with 'em, fawn upon 'em, and carefs 'em ;

Appeal

34 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Appeal to them, to them relate thy Wrongs,
And make them Judges of thy Father's Justice?
Thy cruel and unnatural Lust of Power
Has sunk thy Father more than all his Years,
And made him wither in a green old Age.

Artax. False all as Hell: Nor had I arm'd my Friends
But to defend that Right —

Qu. Dost thou not come,
Impatient of Delay to hasten Fate?
To bring that Death, the lingering Disease
Would only for a Day or two defer.

Artax. I hear thee, and disdain thy little Malice,
That dares to stain my Vertue with a Crime
It views with most Abhorrence; but Reproach
Is lost on thee, since Modesty with all
The Vertues that adorn thy Sex is fled.

Qu. Audacious Rebel!

Artax. Infamous Adulteress!
Stain of my Father's Bed, and of his Throne!

Artab. Villain! thou ly'st! Oh Madam give me way.

[*To the Queen, who holds him, drawing his Sword.*
Whatever bars my Fury calls me base,
Unworthy of the Honour of your Son.

Qu. Hold *Artaban*! My Honour suffers not
From his leud Breath, nor shall thy Sword profane,
With Brawls or Blood the Reverence of this Place,
To Peace and sacred Majesty devoted.

Artax. Ha! Who art thou?

Artab. The Son of great *Arfaces*.

Artax. No! 'tis false! thy forging Mother's damn'd
Contrivance.

Seek for thy Father in that plotting Fellow,
The Hero's Race disclaims thee. Why dost thou frown,
And knit thy boyish Brow? Dost thou dare ought
Worthy the Rank of the Divine *Arfaces*?

If so, come forth, break from that Woman's Arms,
And meet me with thy good Sword like a Man.

Artab. Yes! *Artaxerxes*, yes! thou shalt be met:
The mighty Gods have held us in the Balance,
And one of us is doom'd to sink for ever.

Nor

Nor can I bear a long Delay of Fate,
But with the great Decision were ev'n now.
Proud and ambitious Prince, I dare like thee,
All that is great and glorious. Like thine,
Immortal Thirst of Empire fires my Soul;
My Soul, which of superior Power impatient,
Disdains thy Elderſhip; therefore in Arms
(Which give the nobleſt Right to Kings) I will
To Death diſpute with thee the Throne of *Cyrus*.

Artax. Do this, and thou art worthy of my Anger.
O Energy Divine of great Ambition,
That can inform the Souls of beardless Boys,
And ripen 'em to Men in ſpite of Nature.
I tell thee, Boy, that Empire is a Cauſe,
For which the Gods might wage immortal War.
Then let my Soul exert her utmoſt Vertue,
And think at leaſt thou art *Arſaces'* Son,
That the Idea of thy fancy'd Father
May raiſe and animate my leſſer Genius,
And make thee fit to meet my Arm in Battel.

Artab. Oh doubt not but my Soul is charm'd with
Greatneſs,
So much it rivals ev'n the Joy of Knowledge
And ſacred Wiſdom. What makes Gods divine,
But Power and Science infinite?
Hear only this; our Father preſs'd by Age,
And a long Train of Evils which that brings,
Languiſhes in the laſt Extremes of Life:
Since thou wouldſt blot my Birth with baſe Diſhonour,
Be this my Proof of filial Piety,
While yet he lives, ceaſe we our Enmity;
Nor let the hideous Noiſe of War diſturb
His parting Soul.

Artax. I take thee at thy Word:
Let his Remains of Life be Peace betwixt us,
And after that let all our time be War.
Remember when we meet, ſince one muſt fall,
Who conquers and ſurvives, ſurvives to Empire.

[*Exeunt ſeverally, Queen and Artab.* *Artax.* *Mem.*

(*cum ſuis.*)
Manent

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Manent Mirza and Magas.

Mirz. Most fortunate Event ! which gives us more
Than even our Wishes could have ask'd. This Truce
Gives lucky Opportunity for thinking ;
'Twill lull these thoughtless Heroes to Security.

Mag. Th' approaching Festival will more confirm it :
Of all those sacred Times which heretofore
Religion has distinguish'd from the rest,
And to the Service of the Gods devoted,
This has been still most venerable held ;
Among the Vulgar, Toil and Labour ceases
With Chaplets crown'd, they dance to the shrill Pipe,
And in their Songs invoke those milder Deities,
That soften anxious Life with Peace and Pleasure ;
Slaves are enfranchis'd, and inveterate Foes
Forget, or at the least suspend their Hate,
And meet like Friends. . Pernicious Discord seems
Out-rooted from our more than Iron-Age :
The Gods are worship'd with unusual Reverence,
Since none, not ev'n our Kings, approach their Temples
With any Mark of War's destructive Rage,
But Sacrifice unarm'd.

Mirz. A lucky Thought
Is in my Mind at once compleatly form'd,
Like *Grecian Pallas* in the Head of *Jove*.
When *Memnon*, *Artaxerxes*, and their Friends,
Shall, in obedience to the Holy Rites,
To-morrow at the Altars bow unarm'd,
Orchânes with a Party of the Guards,
Who in my Palace shall this Night be plac'd,
May at that private Door which opens into
The Temple, rush at once, and seize 'em all.
The Heads once safe, the mean and heartless Crowd
With ease may be dispers'd.

Mag. What you propose
Wears a successful Face, were it as innocent :
An Act of such outrageous Profanation,
May shock the Thoughts ev'n of our closest Friends,
And make 'em start from an abhor'd Alliance,

That

That draws the Vengeance of the Gods upon 'em.

Mirz. Art thou the first to start a Doubt like that?
Art thou (who dost inspire their Oracles,
And teach 'em to deceive the easy Crowd
In doubtful Phrase) afraid of thy own Gods?
In every change they were on thy side still,
And sure they will not leave thee now for Trifles.
The Gods shall certainly befriend our Cause,
At least not be our Foes, nor will they leave
Their happy Seats (where free from Care and Pain,
Bless'd in themselves alone, of Man regardless,
They loll serene in everlasting Ease)
To mind the trivial Business of our World.

Mag. But more I fear the superstitious Vulgar,
Who tho unknowing what Religion means,
Yet nothing moves 'em more than zealous Rage
For its Defence, when they believe it violated.

Mirz. I was to blame to tax the Priest with Scruples,
Or think his Care of Interest was his Conscience. [*Aside.*
My Caution shall obviate all thy Fears;
We will give out that they themselves design'd
To fire the Temple, and then kill the King.
No matter tho it seem not very probable,
More monstrous Tales have oft amus'd the Vulgar.

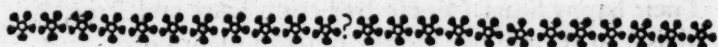
Mag. I yield to your Direction; and to strengthen
The Enterprize, will secretly dispose
A Party of my own within the Temple,
To join with yours.

Mirz. It joys my Heart to think
That I shall glut my Vengeance on this *Memnon*;
That I shall see him strive in vain, and curse
The happy Fraud that caught him. Like a Lion,
Who long has reign'd the Terror of the Woods,
And dar'd the boldest Huntsmen to the Combat;
Till catch'd at length within some hidden Snare,
With foaming Jaws he bites the Toils that hold him,
And roars and rolls his fiery Eyes in vain,
While the surrounding Swains at pleasure wound him,
And make his Death their Sport:
Thus Wit still gets the Mastery o'er Courage.

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Long time unmatched in War the Hero shone,
And mighty Fame in Fields of Battel won ;
Till one fine Project of the Statesman's Brain
Bereaves him of the Spoils his Arms did gain,
And renders all his boasted Prowess vain. 6

[*Exeunt.*]




A C T III.

SCENE I. *A Garden belonging to Mirza's Palace.*

Cleone is discover'd lying on a Bank of Flowers, *Beliza* attending.

S O N G, by B. Stote Esq;

 *PON* a shady Bank repos'd,
Philanthe, amorous, young, and fair,
Sighing to the Groves disclos'd
The Story of her Care.

*The Vocal Groves give some relief,
While they her Notes return ;
The Waters murmur o'er her Grief,
And Echo seems to mourn,*

*A Swain that heard the Nymph complain,
In pity of the Fair,
Thus kindly strove to cure her Pain,
And ease her Mind of Care.*

'Tis

'Tis just that Love should give you rest,
From Love your Torments came;
Take that warm Cordial to your Breast,
And meet a kinder Flame.

*How wretched must the Woman prove,
Beware fair Nymph, beware,
Whose Folly scorns another's Love,
And courts her own Despair.*

Cle. Oh Love! Thou Bane of an unhappy Maid!
Still art thou busy at my panting Heart?
Still dost thou melt my Soul with thy soft Images,
And make my Ruin pleasing? Fondly I try
By Gales of Sighs and Floods of streaming Tears,
To vent my Sorrows, and assuage my Passions;
Still fresh Supplies renew th' exhausted Stores.
Love reigns my Tyrant, to himself alone
He vindicates the Empire of my Breast,
And banishes all Thoughts of Joy for ever.

Bel. Why are you still thus cruel to your self?
Why do you feed and cherish the Disease,
That preys on your dear Life? How can you hope
To find a Cure for Love in Solitude?
Why rather chuse you not to shine at Court?
And in a thousand gay Diversions there,
To lose the Memory of this wretched Passion?

Cleo. Alas! *Beliza*, thou hast never known
The fatal Power of a resistless Love:
Like that avenging Guilt that haunts the Impious,
In vain we hope by flying to avoid it,
In Courts and Temples it pursues us still,
And in the loudest Clamours will be heard:
It grows a Part of us, lives in our Blood,
And every beating Pulse proclaims its Force.
Oh! think not then that I can shun my self;
The Grave can only hide me from my Sorrows,

Bel. Allow me then at least to share your Griefs,
Companions in Misfortunes make 'em less;

40 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

And I could suffer much to make you easy.

Cleo. Sit by me, gentle Maid, and while I tell
A wretched Tale of unregarded Love,
If thou in kind Compassion of my Woes,
Shalt sigh or shed a Tear for my mishap,
My grateful Eyes shall pay it back with Interest.
Help me to rail at my too easy Heart,
That rashly entertain'd this fatal Guest :
And you, my Eyes, why were you still impatient
Of any other sight but *Artaxerxes* ?
Why did you make my Woman's Heart acquainted
With all the thousand Graces and Perfections,
That dress the lovely Hero up for Conquest ?

Bel. Had you oppos'd this Passion in its Infancy,
E'er Time had given it strength, it might have dy'd.

Cleo. That was the fatal Error that undid me :
My Virgin Thoughts, and unexperienc'd Innocence,
Found not the Danger till it was too late.
And tho when first I saw the charming Prince,
I felt a pleasing Motion at my Heart,
Short breathing Sighs heav'd in my panting Breast,
The mounting Blood flush'd in my glowing Face,
And dy'd my Cheeks with more than usual Blushes ;
I thought him sure the Wonder of his Kind,
And wish'd my Fate had given me such a Brother :
Yet knew not that I lov'd, but thought that all,
Like me, beheld and bless'd him for his Excellence.

Bel. Sure never hopeless Maid was curs'd before
With such a wretched Passion ; all the Gods
Join to oppose your Happiness ; 'tis said
This day the Prince shall wed the fair *Amestris*.

Cleo. No, my *Beliza*, I have never known
The pleasing Thoughts of Hope : Certain Despair
Was born at once, and with my Love increas'd.

Bel. Think you the Prince has e'er perceiv'd your
Thoughts ?

Cleo. Forbid it, all ye chaster Powers, that favour
The Modesty and Innocence of Maids :
No, till my Death no other Breast but thine
Shall e'er participate the fatal Secret.

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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O could I think that he had ever known
My hidden Flame, Shame and Confusion
Would force my Virgin Soul to leave her Mansion,
And certain Death ensue.

Thou nam'st the fair *Amestris*, didst thou not?

Bel. Madam, I did.

Cleo. I envy not her Happiness ;
Tho sure few of our Sex are blest'd like her
In such a Godlike Lord.

Would I had been a Man !
With Honour then I might have sought his Friendship ;
Perhaps from long Experience of my Faith,
He might have lov'd me better than the rest.
Amidst the Dangers of the horrid War,
Still had I been the nearest to his side ;
In Courts and Triumphs still had shar'd his Joys,
Or when the sportful Chace had call'd us forth,
Together had we cheer'd our foaming Steeds,
Together press'd the Savage o'er the Plain :
And when o'er-labour'd with the pleasing Toil,
Stretch'd on the verdant Soil had slept together.
But whither does my roving Fancy wander ?
These are the sick Dreams of fantastick Love.
So in a Calenture, the Seaman fancies
Green Fields and flowry Meadows on the Ocean,
Till leaping in, the Wretch is lost for ever.

Bel. Try but the common Remedies of Love,
And let a second Flame expel the first.

Cleo. Impossible ; as well thou mayst imagine,
When thou complain'st of Heat at scorching Noon,
Another Sun shall rise to shine more kindly.

Believe me, my *Beliza*, I am grown
So fond of the Delusion that has charm'd me,
I hate the officious Hand that offers Cure.

Bel. Madam, Prince *Artaban* !

Cleo. My cruel Stars !
Do you then envy me my very Solitude ;
But Death, the Wretch's only Remedy,
Shall hide me from your hated Light for ever.

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Enter Artaban.

Artab. Ah ! lovely Mourner, still, still wilt thou blast
My eager Love with un auspicious Tears ?
When at thy Feet I kneel, and sue for Pity,
Or justly of thy cold Regards complain,
Still wilt thou only answer me with Sighs ?

Cleo. Alas ! my Lord, what Answer can I give ?
If still I entertain you with my Grief,
Pity the Temper of a wretched Maid,
By Nature sad, and born the Child of Sorrow :
In vain you ask for Happiness from me,
Who want it for my self.

Art. Can blooming Youth,
And Virgin Innocence, that knows not Guilt,
Know any Cause for Grief ?

Cleo. Do but survey
The miserable State of Human Kind,
Where Wretches are the general Increase,
And tell me if there be not Cause for Grief.

Art. Such Thoughts as these, my fair Philosopher,
Inhabit wrinkled Cheeks and hollow Eyes ;
The Marks which Years set on the wither'd Sage :
The gentle Goddess, Nature, wisely has
Allotted other Cares for Youth and Beauty.
The God of Love stands ready with his Torch
To light it at thy Eyes, but still in vain,
For e'er the Flame can catch 'tis drown'd in Tears.

Cleo. Oh ! name not Love, the worst of all Misfor-
tunes,

The common Ruin of my easy Sex,
Which I have sworn for ever to avoid,
In memory of all those hapless Maids,
That Love has plung'd in unexampled Woes.

Artab. Forbear to argue with that Angel Face,
Against the Passion thou wert form'd to raise.
Alas ! thy frozen Heart has only known
Love in reverse, not tasted of its Joys ;
The Wishes, soft Desires, and pleasing Pains,

That

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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That centre all in most extatick Bliss.

Oh, lovely Maid, mispend no more that Treasure
Of Youth and Charms, which lavish Nature gives;
The *Paphian* Goddess frowns at thy Delay;
By her fair self, and by her Son she swears,
Thy Beauties are devoted to her Service.

Lo! now she shoots her Fires into my Breast;
She urges my Desires, and bids me seize thee,

[*Taking her Hand, and kissing it.*

And bear thee as a Victim to her Altar,
Then offer up ten thousand thousand Joys,
As an Amends for all thy former Coldness.

Cleo. Forbear, my Lord; or I must swear to fly
For ever from your Sight.

Artab. Why dost thou frown,
And damp the rising Joy within my Breast?
Art thou resolv'd to force thy gentle Nature,
Compassionate to all the World beside,
And only to me cruel? Shall my Vows,
Thy Father's Intercession, all be vain?

Cleo. Why do you urge my Father's fatal Power,
To curse you with a sad-unlucky Bride?
Cast round your Eyes on our gay-Eastern Courts,
Where smiling Beauties, born to better Fates,
Give Joy to the Beholders:
There bless some happy Princess with your Vows,
And leave the poor *Cleone* to her Sorrows.

Artab. What Queens are those, of most celestial Forms;
Whose Charms can drive thy Image from my Heart?
Oh were they cast in Nature's fairest Mold,
Brighter than *Cynthia's* shining Train of Stars;
Kind as the softest She that ever clasp'd
Her Lover, when the Bridal-Night was past;
I swear I would prefer thee, O *Cleone*,
With all thy Scorn and cold Indifference,
Would chuse to languish and to die for thee,
Much rather than be bless'd, and live for them.

Cleo. Oh Prince! it is too much; nor am I worthy
The Honour of your Passion, since 'tis fix'd
By certain and unalterable Fate,

That

That I can never yield you a Return :

My Thoughts are all to chaste *Diana* vow'd,

And I have sworn to die her Virgin Votary.

Artab. Impossible ! thou canst not give away
Mine and thy Father's Right, even to the Gods ;
Diana will disown the unjust Donation,
Nor favour such an Injury to Love.

To every Power Divine I will appeal,
Nor shall thy Beauty bribe 'em to be partial.
Their Altars now expect us : Come, fair Saint,
And if thou wilt abide their righteous Doom,
Their Justice must decree my Happiness,
Reward my Sufferings, and my Flame approve,
For they themselves have felt the Pow'r of Love.

[*Exeunt*]

SCENE II. *The Temple of the Sun.*

Enter Artaxerxes, Amestris, and Attendants.

Artax. 'Tis done ! 'Tis done ! Oh let me find some way
To tell the mighty Joy that fills my Breast,
Lest I grow mad with Height of furious Bliss.
The holy Priest has ty'd the sacred Knot,
And my *Amestris* now is all my own.
Oh thou soft Charmer ! thou excelling Sweetness !
Why art thou not transported all like me :
I swear thou dost not love thy *Artaxerxes*,
If thou art calm in this Excess of Happiness.

Amest. Alas ! my Lord, my panting Heart yet trembles
In vast suspense between unruly Joys
And chilling Fears ; somewhat methinks there is
That checks my Soul, and says I was too bold
To quit the Pleasures of my Virgin State
To barter 'em for Cares and anxious Love.

Artax. These are the Fears which wait on every Bride,
And only serve for Preludes to her Joys ;
Short Sighs, and all those Motions of thy Heart,
Are Nature's Call, and kindle warm Desires.

Soon as the friendly Goddess of the Night,
Shall draw her Veil of Darkness o'er thy Blushes,
These little cold unnecessary Doubts
Shall fly the Circle of my folding Arms:
And when I press thee trembling to my Bosom,
Thou shalt confess (if there be room for Words,
Or ev'n for Thoughts) that all those Thoughts are Bliss.

Amest. Yet surely mine are more than common Fears:
For, Oh! my Prince, when my foreboding Heart
Surveys th' uncertain State of human Joys,
How secretly the Malice of our Fate
Unseen pursues, and often blasts our Happiness
In full Security; I justly dread,
Lest Death or Parting, or some unseen Accident,
Much worse, if possible, than each of these,
Should curse us more than ever we were bless'd.

Artax. Doubt not the Gods, my Fair, whose righteous Power
Shall favour and protect our virtuous Loves.
If still thou apprehend'st approaching Danger,
Let us make haste, and snatch th' uncertain Joy,
While Fate is in our power.
Now let us part, and give a loose to Love,
Feast ev'ry sense with most luxurious Pleasure,
Improve our Minutes, make 'em more than Years,
Than Ages, and ev'n live the Life of Gods:
If after this, Death or Ill-Fortune comes,
It cannot injure us, since we already
Have liv'd, and been before-hand with our Fate.

Amest. Oh! let me ease at once my tender Heart,
And tell my dearest Lord my worst of Fears;
There is an Ill which more than Death I dread:
Should you, by Time and long Fruition sated,
Grow faithless, and forget the lost *Amestris*;
Forget that everlasting Truth you vow'd,
Tho sure I should not publicly complain,
Nor to the Gods accuse my perjur'd Prince,
Yet my soft Soul would sink beneath the Weight;
I should grow mad, and curse my very Being,
And wish I ne'er had been, or not been lov'd.

Artax.

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Artax. Dost thou? — when every happier Star shines
for us,

And with propitious Influence gilds our Fortune,
Dost thou invent fantastick Forms of Danger,
And fright thy Soul with things that are impossible?
Now by the potent God of Love, I swear,
I will have ample Vengeance for thy Doubts.
My soft complaining Fair, shalt thou not pay me
In Joys too fierce for Thought, for these Suspicions?
The Bands which hold our Love are knit by Fate,
Nor shall decaying Time or Nature loose 'em.
Beyond the Limits of the silent Grave,
Love shall survive, immortal as our Beings :
And when at once we climb yon azure Skies,
We will be shown to all the Bless'd above,
For the most constant Pair that e'er deserv'd
To mingle with their Stars.

Amest. 'Tis true ! 'tis true !

Nor ought I to suspect thee, O my Hero !
The Gods have form'd thee for the nearest Pattern
Of their own Excellence and perfect Truth.
O let me sink upon thy gentle Bosom,
And, blushing, tell how greatly I am bless'd.
Forgive me, Modesty, if here I vow
That all the Pleasures of my Virgin State
Were poor and trifling to the present Rapture :
A gentle Warmth invades my glowing Breast,
And while I fondly gaze upon thy Face,
Ev'n Thought is lost in exquisite Delight.

Artax. Oh thou delicious perfect Angel Woman !
Thou art too much for mortal Sense to bear :
The vernal Bloom and Fragrancy of Spices,
Wasted by gentle Winds, are not like thee.
From thee, as from the *Cyprian* Queen of Love,
Ambrosial Odours flow ; my every Faculty
Is charm'd by thee, and drinks immortal Pleasure.
O glorious God of Day, fly swiftly forward,
And to thy Sister's Rule resign the World :
Nor haste to rise again, but let the Night

Long

Long blefs me with her ftay, that thy Return
At Morn may find me happieft of my kind.

Enter Memnon.

My Father ! is there an Increafe of Joy ?
What can ye give, ye Gods, to make it more ?

Mem. Ye Bleffings of my Age ! Whom when I view,
The Memory of former Woes is loft.

Oh Prince ! Well has this glorious Day repay'd
My Youth and Blood fpent in *Arfaces*' Service.
Nor had the Gods indulg'd my vaineft Wifhes,
Durft I have ask'd for fuch a Son as you are.
But I am roughly bred, in words unknowing,
Nor can I phrafe my Speech in apt Expreflion,
To tell how much I love and honour you :
Might I but live to fight one Battel for you,
Tho with my Life I bought the Victory,
Tho my old batter'd Trunk were hew'd to pieces,
And fcatrer'd o'er the Field, yet fhould I blefs
My Fate, and think my Year's wound up with Honour.

Artab. Doubt not, my noble Father, but ev'n yet
A large Remain of Glory is behind.

When Civil Difcord fhall be reconcil'd,
And all the Noife of Faction hush'd to Peace,
Rough *Greece*, alike in Arts and Arms fevere,
No more fhall brand the *Persian* Name with Softnefs.

Athens and *Sparta* wondring, fhall behold us,
Strict in our Difcipline, undaunted, patient
Of War's ftern Toil, and dread our hostile Vertue.
Thofe ftubborn Commonwealths, that proudly dare
Difdain the glorious Monarchs of the Eaft,
Shall pay their Homage to the Throne of *Cyrus*.

And when with Lawrels cover'd we return,
My Love fhall meet, and fmiling blefs our Triumph,
While at her Feet I lay the Scepters of the World.

Mem. Oh glorious Theme ! By Heav'n it fires my
Age,
And kindles Youth again in my cold Veins.

Artax.

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Artax. Ha! *Mirza* and the *Queen*! retire my Fair,
Ungentle Hate and brawling Rage shall not
Disturb the Peace, to which this happy Day
Is doubly sacred. Forward, to the Altar.

[*Exeunt Artaxerxes, Amestris, Memnon, and*
(Attendants).

Enter at the other Door, Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.

Mirz. All are dispos'd, and Fate but waits our Orders
For a deciding Blow.

Qu. Your Caution was
Both wise and faithful, not to trust my Son
Too rashly with a Secret of this nature :
The Youth, tho great of Soul, and fond of Glory,
Yet leans to the fantastick Rules of Honour,
Would hesitate at such an Act as this,
Tho future Empire should depend upon it.

Mirz. When Time shall add Experience to that
Knowledge,
With which his early Youth is richly fraught,
He'll be convinc'd that only Fools would lose
A Crown for notionary Principles.
Honour is the unthinking Soldier's Boast,
Whose dull Head cannot reach those finer Arts,
By which Mankind is govern'd.

Qu. And yet it gives a Lustre to the Great,
And makes the Croud adore 'em.

Mirz. Your Son shall reap
The whole Advantage, while we bear the Guilt :
You, Madam, when the sacred Hymns are finish'd,
Must with the Prince retire ; our Foes when seiz'd,
Within the Temple may be best secur'd,
Till you dispose their Fate.

Qu. The Rites attend us, [Solemn Musick is heard.
This day my Son is Monarch of the East.

Mirz. Lend us, ye Gods, your Temples but this Day,
You shall be paid with Ages of Devotion,

And

And after this for ever undisturb'd,
Brood o'er your smoking Altars.

[*Exeunt Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.*]

SCENE II.

The Scene opening, shews the Altar of the Sun, Magas, and several other Priests attending. Solemn Musick is heard: then enter on one side Memnon, Artaxerxes, Amestris, and Attendants; on the other side the Queen, Mirza, Artaban, Cleone, Cleanthes, and Attendants: they all bow towards the Altar, and then range themselves on each side of the Stage, while the following Hymn is perform'd in Parts, and Chorus by the Priests.

H Y M N to the Sun, by W. Shippen Esq;

HAIL Light, that doubly glads our Sphere,
Glory and Triumph of the Year!
Hail Festival, for ever blest,
By the adoring ravish'd East!

Hail Mithras, mighty Deity!
For Fire and Air, and Earth and Sea,
From thee their Origin derive,
Motion and Form from thee receive.

When Matter yet unacted lay,
No sooner thou infus'd thy Ray,
But the dull Mass its Power obey'd,
But an harmonious World was made.

Which still, when thou withdrawst thy Beams,
An undistinguish'd Chaos seems;
For what are Objects without sight?
Or Vision when involv'd in Night?

E

Night

50 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

*Night is an universal Grave,
Where Things but doubtful Beings have,
Till them thy Beams illuminate,
And, as it were, again create.*

Chorus, &c.

*Hail Source of immaterial Fire,
That ne'er began, can ne'er expire;
Whose Orb, with streaming Glories fraught,
Dazzles the Ken of human Thought!*

*All the dependent Spheres above,
By thy Direction shine and move.
All purer Beings here below,
From thy immediate Essence flow.*

*What is the Soul of Man but Light,
Drawn down from thy transcendent Height?
What but an Intellectual Beam?
A Spark of thy immortal Flame?*

*For as thou rul'st with gladsome Rays
The greater World, so this the less;
And like thy own diffusive Soul,
Shoots Life and Vigour thro the whole.*

*Since then from Thee at first it came,
To Thee, tho clogg'd, it points its Flame;
And conscious of superiour Birth,
Despises this unkindred Earth.*

Chorus, &c.

*Hail Orosinades, Pow'r Divine!
Permit us to approach thy Shrine;
Permit thy Votaries to raise
Their grateful Voices to thy Praise.*

*Thou art the Father of our Kings,
The Stem whence their high Lineage springs;*

The

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

51

*The Sov'reign Lord that does maintain
Their uncontroll'd and boundless Reign.*

*O then assist thy drooping Son,
Who long has grac'd our Persian Throne !
O may he yet extend his Sway !
We yet Arfaces' Rule obey !*

*Let thy Vitality impart
New Spirits to his fainting Heart ;
Let him, like thee, (from whom he sprung)
Be ever Active, ever Young.
Chorus, &c.*

*When the Musick is ended, Memnon, Artaxerxes, &c.
Queen, Artaban, &c. go off as they enter'd, severally ;
only Mirza comes forward, and the Scene shuts ; he
looks after Amestris going out, and then speaks.*

*Mirz. What means this foreign Warmth within my
Breast ?*

*Is this a time for any Thought but Vengeance ?
That fatal Beauty dazles my weak Sense,
And blasts the Resolution of my Soul ;
My Eyes in contradiction to my Purpose,
Still bent to her, and drunk the Poison in ;
While I stood stupid in suspense of Thought.
And now like Oil my flaming Spirits blaze ;
My Arteries, my Heart, my Brain is scorch'd,
And I am all one Fury. Feeble Mirza !
Canst thou give way to Dotage, and become
The Jest of Fools ? No ! 'tis impossible :
Revenge shall rouse, and with her Iron Whips
Lash forth this lazy Ague from my Blood,
This Malady of Girls. Remember, Statesman,
Thy Fate and future Fortunes now are forming,
And summon all thy Counsels to their Aid,
Ev'n thy whole Soul. It wo't not be : Amestris
Still rises uppermost in all my Thoughts,
The Master-piece of Nature. The Boy God.*

E 2

Laughs.

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Laughs at my Rage, and triumphs o'er my Folly.

[*A tumultuous Noise is heard.*]

Ha! by the Gods 'tis doing! Now my Stars
Be kind, and make me Master of my Wish at once.

Enter Magas.

But see the Priest! Why dost thou stare and tremble?
Have we succeeded? say; and ease my Fears.

Mag. My Soul is pierc'd with Horror! Every God
Seems from his Shrine to threaten us with Vengeance.
The Temple reels, and all its pond'rous Roof
Nods at the Profanation.

Mirz. Base and fearful!
How can thy wretched Soul conceive such Monsters?
Canst thou who would'st be great be superstitious?
But 'tis the Coward's Vice. Say, are our Enemies se-
cur'd?

Mag. They are; the Prince, old *Memnon*, and his
Daughter
Are in *Orchanes'* hands, only *Tigranes*
With some of lesser Note are fled.

Mirz. No matter:
These are the Soul, the rest a lifeless Mass,
Not worth our Apprehension.

Mag. Will you stay,
To meet the furious Thunder of their Rage?

Mirz. I will: Thou may'st retire, and summon back
Thy scatter'd Spirits: Let not the Crowd see
Thy Fears; 'twill make thee vile and cheap among 'em.
[*Exit Magas.*]

*Enter Artaxerxes, Memnon, and Amestris, Prisoners,
Orchanes, and Guards.*

Artax. Slave! Villain! Answer, say how hast thou
dar'd
To do this Insolence? —

Orch. I know my Orders,
Which from the Queen my Mistress I receiv'd,

Who

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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Who will avow her own Authority.

Artax. Ha ! from the Queen ! She durst not, 'tis impossible !

'Tis Sacrilege ! 'tis Treason ! 'tis Damnation !
Am I not *Artaxerxes* ? Born to Empire,
The next Degree to Gods. O thou bright Sun !
That roll'st above, the Object of our Worship,
Canst thou behold, and not avenge thy Race ?
Thy injur'd Race ? If I could ought admit
Unworthy of thy great Original,
Let me be doom'd to fall this Villain's Slave ;
If not !——Why am I made the Scorn of Wretches—
So much below me, that they hardly share
The common Privilege of Kind ; but are
As Beasts to Men——

Mem. See where the Master Villain stands ! Unmov'd
And harden'd in Impiety, he laughs
At the fictitious Justice of the Gods,
And thinks their Thunder has not Wings to reach him—
But know the Joy thy Triumph brings is short ;
My Fate, (if the Gods govern) or at least
My Mind's beyond thy reach, and scorns thy Malice—

Mirz. Dull valiant Fool, thy Ruin is the least,
The most ignoble Triumph of my Wit.
Cleander's Blood asks for substantial Vengeance,
And when the Thought that labours in my Breast
Appears in Action, thou shalt know the Cause
Why I remain to view thy hated Face,
That blasts me with its Presence ; thou shalt know it,
And curse thy self, curse the ill-omen'd Day
That gave thee Birth, renouncing all the Gods ;
Thy self of them renounc'd, shalt sink to Hell
In bitterest Pangs, and mingle with the Furies.

Mem. Unhallow'd Dog, thou ly'st ! The utmost Force
Of all thy study'd Malice cannot move me :
And if the Gods in tryal of my Vertue,
Can yield my Life up to thy Hangman's Mercy ;
I'll shew thee with what ease the Brave and Honest
Can put off Life, till thou shalt damn thy Arts,
Thy wretched Arts, and Impotence of Malice.

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Mirz. Rest well assur'd, thou shalt have Cause to try
The Philosophick Force of passive Vertue.

Artax. O Death to Greatness! Can we fall so low,
To be the slavish Objects of his Mirth?
Shall my just Rage and violated Honour
Play the Buffoon, and minister to Laughter?
Down, down, my swelling Heart, hide thy Resentments,
Nor prostitute the ruffled Majesty
Of injur'd Princes to the gazing Crowd,
My Face shall learn to cover the Emotion
My wounded Soul endures. Ha! my *Amestris*?
My Love! my Royal Bride! the Spoiler, Grief,
Defaces every Feature, like the Deluge
That raz'd the Beauties of the first Creation;
I cannot bear it: Villains, give me way!

[*He breaks from the Guard that holds him,
and catches hold of Amestris.*]

Oh! let me hold thee in my throbbing Bosom,
And strive to hide thy Sorrows from my sight,
I cannot see thy Grievs; and yet I want
The Power to bring Relief.

Ames. Ah! No my Prince!
There are no Remedies for Ills like ours;
My helpless Sex by Nature stands expos'd
To all the Wrongs and Injuries of Fortune;
Defenceless in my self, you were my Refuge,
You are my Lord, to whom should I complain,
Since you cannot redress me? Were you not
The Honour, Joy, and Safety of *Amestris*?
For you alone I liv'd, with you alone
I could be happy, Oh my *Artaxerxes*!
One Influence guides our consenting Stars,
And still together we are bless'd or curs'd.

Mirz. With a malignant Joy my Ears drink in,
Hear each harmonious Accent, every Glance
Goes to my Heart, and stirs alternate Motions
Of Heat and Cold; a lazy Pleasure now
Thrills all my Veins, anon Desire grows hot,
And my old Sinews shrink before the Flame.

Artax. Go on! And charm me with thy Angel's Voice,
Sooth

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

55

Sooth and assuage the Fury in my Breast,
That urges me to unbecoming Passion:
My Rage grows cool amidst thy soft Complainings;
And tho thou talk'st of Woes, of Death and Ruin,
'Tis Heaven to hear thee.

Ames. Since this is all our wretched Consolation,
Let us indulge our Grief, till by long use
It grows habitual, and we lose the Pain.
Here on the marble Pavement will we sit,
Thy Head upon my Breast; and if Remembrance
Of cruel Wrongs shall vex thy noble Heart,
The Murmur of my Sighs shall charm the Tumult,
And Fate shall find us calm: Nor will the Gods,
Who here inhabit and behold our Sufferings,
Delay to end our Woes in Immortality,

Artax. Ha! say'st thou? Gods! Yes certain there are
Gods,

To whom my Youth with Reverence still has bow'd,
Whose Care and Providence are Verue's Guard;
Think then, my Fair, they have not made us great,
And like themselves, for miserable Ends.

Mirz. Gods might behold her, and forget their Wisdom.

But I delay too long. *Orchanes*, lend thy Ear.

[*Mirza whispers Orchanes, and Exit.*

Mem. My Children! you were still my Joy and Happiness:

Why am I made your Curse? This hated Head,
To Death devoted, has involv'd your Innocence
In my Destruction.

[*Guards lay hold on Artax. and Amestris.*

Ames. Alas, my Father! ———

Artax. Barbarous Dogs! What mean you?

Orch. Convey the Lady to Lord *Mirza's* Palace,
'Tis the Queen's Will she shall be there confin'd.

Artax. Thou canst not mean so damn'd a Villany!
Thou dar'st not! shalt not part us! Fate cannot do it!

Mem. Cursed Old-Age, why have I liv'd to see this?

Orch. Force 'em asunder.

Art.

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Art. Hew off my Limbs, ye Dogs ! I will not loose
'em——

Oh Devils ! Death and Furies ! my Wife ! my lov'd

Amestris——

Ames. My Lord ! my Husband ! ——

*Orchanes and one Party of the Guards force Artaxerxes
and Memnon off one way, and the other Party bears
Amestris another.*

Re-enter Mirza.

Mirz. This was most noble Mischief ! it stung home,
'Twas Luxury of Vengeance——'twas not ill
To keep aloof ; these boisterous Beasts have Paws,
And might have scratch'd : The Wife should not allow
A possibility to Fortune's Malice.
Now to the rest ; this Prince ! this Husband ! dies :
To-morrow's Dawn brings his and *Memnon's* Fate.
This Night let 'em despair, and ban, and rage,
And to the wooden Deities within
Tell frantick Tales : my Hours shall pass more pleasingly ;
If Love (which yet I know not) can give Pleasure.
Love ! What is Love ? the Passion of a Boy,
That spends his time in Laziness and Sonnets :
Lust is the Appetite of Man ; and shall
Be sated, till it loath the cloying Banquet.
The Wife by human Frailty are
To taste these Pleasures, but not dwell upon 'em ;
They mar and dull the Faculty of Thinking :
One Night I safely may indulge in Rior,
'Tis politick Lewdness, and assists my Vengeance ;
I will grow young, and surfeit on her Charms,
Her luscious Sweets ; then rising from her Arms,
The nauseous, momentary Joy forget,
And be my self again ; again be Wife and Great.


[*Exit Mirza.*]

ACT

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The Palace.*

Enter Artaban and Cleanthes.

Artab.  IS base and impious! Where are the
Ties
Shall keep Mankind in Order, if Religion

And publick Faith be violated? 'Tis an Injury
That beards both Gods and Men, and dares their Justice.

Clean. The fearful Crowd already take th' Alarm,
Break off their solemn Sports, their Songs and Dances,
And wildly in tumultuous Confort join ;

Mischief and Danger sits in ev'ry Face,
And while they dread the Anger of the Gods,
The Wise who know th' Effects of popular Fury,
From them expect that Vengeance which they fear.

Artab. The sacred Power of Majesty, which should
Forbid, owns and protects the Violence ;
It must not, shall not be : Who steals a Crown
By Arts like these, wears it unworthily.

Clean. The Queen your Mother, Sir! she will expect
You should approve that Act her Power has done.

Artab. I'll meet her as I ought, and show my self
Worthy the noble Rivalship of Empire.

Enter the Queen, Mirza, and Attendants.

Qu. My Son, I come to joy you of a Crown
And Glory certain now ; your Fate at length,
Has master'd that malignant Influence
With which it struggl'd long : You are a King,

The

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The greatest that our *Eastern* World beholds ;
And tho my widow'd Bed be Cause for Grief,
Yet for thy sake, my Son, I joy to say,
Arfaces is no more.

Artab. 'Twere vain and foolish
To mourn his Death with ceremonious Sorrow ;
For tho he dy'd the greatest of our Race,
Yet since decaying Age had sunk him low,
And all the native Majesty was lost,
'Twas time the Soul should seek for Immortality,
And leave the weary Body to enjoy
An honourable Rest from Care and Sickness :
Peace to his Ashes, and eternal Fame
Dwell with his Memory ; while we who live
Look back with Emulation on his Greatness,
And with laborious Steps strive to ascend
That Height where once he sat.

Qu. Thou hast already
Attain'd the lofty Summit of his Glory ;
His Throne expects thee but to sit and fill it.

Artab. No, Madam, when the Gods chuse worthy Subjects

On whom to place such Greatness, they surround
The glorious Prize with Toil and thorny Danger,
And bid the Man who would be Great, dare greatly.
Be it for dull Elder Brothers to possess
Without deserving ; mine's a nobler Claim,
Nor will I taste the Godlike Joys of Power,
Till Men and Gods with Justice shall confess
'Tis barely the Reward of what I meant.

Qu. What means my Son ?

Artab. To wrestle for a Crown !

Qu. With what fantastick Shadow wouldst thou strive ?
The haughty Rival of thy Hopes is fallen ;
He lives indeed, but 'tis to grace thy Triumph,
And bow before thee ; then be swept away
Like the Remembrance of an idle Dream,
Which tho of Yesternight, is now forgotten.

Artab. It grieves me much to say, my Royal Mother,
I cannot take a Crown upon these Terms,

Tho

Tho even from your Hands : The conscious Vertue
That witnesses within my Breast for Glory,
Points me to Greatness by the Paths of Honour,
And urges me to do as a King ought,
That would not wear his Purple as the Gift
Of impious Treachery and base Deceit.

Qu. Amazement turns my Senses ! Or I dream !
For sure thou canst not mean so poor a Folly.
Hast thou been bred in the wise Arts of Empire ?
Been early taught to know the Worth of Power ?
And would'st thou lose the golden Opportunity
With which thy Fortune courts thee, for a Notion ?
An empty Sound of Vertue ? A dry Maxim,
Which Pedants have devis'd for Boys to canvas ?
Can my Son think so meanly ? Go, set free
(Since Honour bids) this Lordly Elder Brother,
Bow like a Slave before him, wait his Pleasures,
And live dependent on his scanty Pension ;
He may reward thy servile Loyalty,
And make thee Ruler of some petty Province,
In recompence of Royalty giv'n up.

Artab. No ! (tho I must confess I would not hold him
Caught in a Villain's Snare, nor do a Murder
Unworthy of a Hangman) yet to death
I still defy him as my mortal Foe.
And since my Father's Fate dissolves that Truce,
To which I stood engag'd, 'tis War again.
Amidst the steely Squadrons will I seek
This haughty Brother, by his Friends surrounded,
And back'd with all th' Advantages of his Birth,
Then bravely prove upon him with my Sword ;
He falsely brands me for a bookish Coward,
That Nature's Error only gave him Preference,
Since Fate meant me the King.

Qu. A Mother's Care is watchful for thy Safety,
Else wert thou lost, thou honourable Fool ;
Long might'st thou vainly hunt in bloody Fields
For that Advantage which thy willing Fortune
Now reaches to thy Hands : In Battels with
Uncertain Wings the wavering Goddess flies,

And

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And oft with partial Hand bestows her Favour
On Fools and thick-skull'd Heroes ; seize her now,
While she is thine, or she is lost for ever.

Artab. No matter, let her fly ; the Eagle Vertue
Shall soar beyond her, and command her flight :
Fortune is not my Mistress, but my Slave.
Posterity, that reads the Name of *Artaban*
In the Records of Empire, shall not blush
To think I plotted with a knavish Priest,
The Scandal of his venerable Function,
And Mark of the Gods Vengeance, to betray
A Prince my Enemy ; as if being conscious
Of lesser Worth, and of unequal Courage,
I durst not fairly strive with him for Greatness.
Let the abhor'd and impious Treachery
Obscurely die, unknown to future Ages ;
Or if our Shame must be deliver'd down,
By all the Kingly Hopes that fire my Soul,
It shall not pass without a Brand of Punishment.

Qu. 'Tis wondrous well ! Young Man, you king it
rarely !

You mean to be renown'd for early Justice,
And mark your ostentatious Love of Vertue,
Ev'n in their Bloods who lift you up to Power :
Perhaps we too our self must be arraign'd
Before your puny Bar, and feel your Ax ;
'Twill be a noble Subject for your Praise,
And yield much Matter to declaiming Flatterers. -

Artab. You, Madam, are my Mother, Nature blinds
me,
And bids me see no Faults in her that bore me ;
Those other Slaves that dare——

Qu. May be immortal,
For ought that thou canst do to cause their Fate.
Is not thy Power the Creature of my Favour,
Which in precarious wise on me depending,
Exists by my Concurrence to its Being ?
Mistaken Youth ! Whose giddy Brain, Ambition
Has, like the Fume of drunken Vapours, turn'd ;
Think'st thou that I whose Soul was form'd for Sway,
Would

Would lay the golden Reins of Empire down ?
Or trust 'em to the Guidance of a Boy ?
Who shall dispose of me, or those that serve me,
According to the Dictates of old Mortals,
His bearded Tutor gleans from musty Authors.

Artab. Nay then 'tis time I should exert my self ;
And tho' you gave me Birth, yet from the Gods
(Who made my Father be as he was, Royal,
And stamp't the Mark of Greatness on my Soul ;)
I claim my Right to Empire : may I fall
Vile and forgotten, if I ever own
Any superior Being but those Gods.

Qu. Thou rav'st ! And hast forgot me.

Artab. No, you are
My Mother, and a Woman, form'd to obey ;
On that Condition all Sexes Privileges
Are founded, the creating Hand has mix'd
Softness and Beauty in your Composition,
To charm and bend the Mind of Man, impatient
Of the ignoble Pleasure ; you were made for
The Weakness and Necessities of Nature :
Ill are your feeble Souls for Greatness suited ;
Desire of Government is monstrous in you.

Qu. Thou mighty Goddess, Nature ! Dost thou hear
This Rebel Son ! This insolent Upbraider !
Still fondly nurs'd in my indulgent Bosom !
To build whose future Greatness to the Skies,
My anxious Soul has labour'd more than when
I felt a Mother's Sorrow for his Birth :
Ungrateful Boy ! —

Know, Fool ! That vaunt'st thy self upon thy Manhood,
The greatest He that rougher Kind e'er had,
Must have confess'd Woman's superior Wit,
And own'd our Sex's just Prerogative.
Did not a Mother's Fondness plead hard for thee,
Thy Head should pay the Forfeit of thy Insolence ;
For know, young King, that I am Fate in *Persia*,
And Life and Death depend upon my Pleasure.

Artab. The World would be well govern'd, should
the Gods

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Depute their Providence to Women's Care,
And trust them with the Fate of Kings and Empires.

Qu. Yet thou art safe! Away! nor tempt me further,
The Patience ev'n of Gods themselves has limits,
Tho they with long forbearance view Man's Folly.
Yet if thou still persist to dare my Power,
Like them I may be urg'd to loose my Vengeance,
And tho thou wer't my Creature, strike thee dead.

Mirz. 'Beseech you, Sir, retire; the Queen your Mother

Labours with wisest Foresight for your Good,
And is incens'd to see you thwart that Purpose.

Artab. What is the Good of Greatness but the Power?
Madam, I leave you; my own innate Vertue
Arms me against your Rage, unjust and impotent:
Wait but the great Success my Soul divines,
And you will own your little juggling Arts
Have only serv'd to obstruct a while my Glory,
And skreen this elder Brother from my Conquest.

[*Exit Artaban and Cleanthes.*

Qu. Some envious Pow'r above, some hostile *Demon*,
Works under-hand against my stronger Genius,
And countermines me with Domestick Jars.

Malicious Chance! When all abroad was safe,
To start an unseen Danger from my self!

Mirza! Didst not thou mark the haughty Boy?
With what assuming Pride he own'd his daring?
And claim'd Superiority of Power?

Oh can I live and bear to be controll'd?
To share the Pleasure of supreme Command
With him or any one? Oh *Artemisa!*

Didst thou disdain Subjection to a Husband,
The proudest Title of that Tyrant Man?

And canst thou yield t' a Boy? A Son! By Nature
And grateful Duty to Obedience bound?

Mirz. Madam, let me intreat you, by the Gods,
To calm your just Resentments: Meddling Fortune,
(Whose Malice labours to perplex the Wife)
If not prevented, will unravel all
Those finer Arts, which we with Care have wove.

The

The Ambitious Step-Mother. 63

The Prince, led on by this pernicious Honour,
May set the Pris'ners free; think, if that happen,
To what a shock of Fate we stand expos'd.

Qu. 'Tis true! this foolish Honour ruins all.
Ridiculous Notion! as if Self-interest
Were not the first and noblest Law of Nature.
Say then, wise Lord, and let thy ready Wit,
Still present to it self, avert this Blow.

Mirz. One Method, tho ungente, yet remains
To remedy the Fears this Ill produces;
This instant let a Guard confine the Prince,
E'er he can gain the Means t' effect that Mischief
He meditates against himself and us:
To morrow, early as the Morning dawns
The Prisoners all shall die; that once dispatch'd,
This raging Fit of Honour will relax,
And give him Leisure to consider coolly
Th' Advantage of his Fortune.

Qu. You have Reason;
And tho I fear his haughty Temper will
But badly brook Confinement, he must learn
To bear it as he can; perhaps 'twill bend him,
And make his Youth more pliant to my Will.

Mirz. Your Orders cannot be dispatch'd too soon,
Each Minute of the flying Hours is precious.

Qu. The Eunuch *Bagoas*! let him attend us,
He shall receive Instructions on the Instant.

[*Exeunt the Queen and Mirza severally.*]

SCENE II. *Mirza's Palace.*

*Enter Cleone in Man's Habit, with a Dark-Lanthorn,
Beliza following.*

Cleo. Ye gentler Powers who view our Cares with Pity,
Lend your Compassion to the poor *Amestris*:
Oh my *Beliza*! was not thy Soul wounded,
To hear (when now we past by her Apartment)
The piercing Accents of her loud Complainings?

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By Heaven my aching Heart bleeds for her Sufferings.

Bel. 'Tis sure she feels the bitterest Pangs of Woe;
And were not all my Thoughts to you devoted,
Her Grief would deeply sink into my Soul.
Why will you tempt alone ten thousand Dangers?
Your Father's and the furious Queen's Resentments?
The cruel Guards, and all those fatal Accidents,
Which in the Horror of this dreadful Night
Might shake the Resolution of a Man?

Cleo. Prithee no more; thou know'st I am resolv'd,
And all thy kind Advice is urg'd in vain.
Thy fond mistaking Fears present the Danger
More dreadful than it is: this Master-key
Admits me thro that Passage to the Temple,
By which the Guards, who seiz'd th' unhappy Prince
This Morning, enter'd; that of all the rest
Is only left unguarded, and from thence,
Assisted by the friendly Veil of Night,
We may conduct him thro my Father's Palace
In safety to the Street; there undistinguish'd
Amongst the busy discontented Crowd,
That swarm in murmuring Heaps, he may retire;
Nor shall my Father or the Queen e'er know
The pious Fraud my Love was guilty of.

Bel. Yet still I fear——

Cleo. No more! Retire and leave me,
My drooping Heart sits lighter than it's wont,
And cheerfully presages good Success.

Bel. Where shall I wait you?

Cleo. At my own Apartment.

Bel. The mighty Gods protect you.

Cleo. Softly! Retire.

[Exit Beliza.

What Noise was that? — The Creature of my Fears.
In vain, fond Maid, wouldst thou belye thy Sex,
Thy Coward Soul confesses thee a Woman,
A foolish, rash, fond Woman. Where am I going?
To save my Godlike Hero! Oh my Heart!
It pants and trembles; sure 'tis Joy, not Fear:
The Thought has given me Courage; I shall save him,
That Darling of my Eyes. What if I fail?

Then

Then Death is in my reach, and ends my Sorrows.

[*Shewing a Dagger.*]

Why dost thou shake, my Hand ; and fear to grasp

This Instrument of Fate ? If I succeed,

Yet *Artaxerxes* will not live for me ;

And my Despair will want thy friendly Aid.

Death ev'ry way shuts up my gloomy Prospect.

If then there be that *Lethe* and *Elysium*

Which Priests and Poets tell, to that dark Stream

My Soul, of Life impatient, shall make haste.

One healing Draught my Quiet shall restore,

And Love forgotten ne'er disturb me more.

[*Exit Cleone.*]

SCENE III.

A Night's Scene of the Temple of the Sun.

Enter Artaxerxes and Memnon.

Artax. Still 'tis in vain ! This idle Rage is vain !

And yet, my swelling Passions will have way ;

And rend my labouring Breast till they find vent.

Was it for this, ye cruel Gods, you made me

Great like your selves, and as a King, to be

Your sacred Image ? Was it but for this ?

To be cut down, and mangled by vile Hands,

Like the false Object of mistaken Worship !

Why rather was I not a peasant Slave ?

Bred from my Birth a Drudge to your Creation,

And to my destin'd Load inur'd betimes ?

Mem. The Malice of our Fate were not compleat,

Had we not been by just degrees, to Happiness

Rais'd, only to be plung'd the deeper down

In an Abyss of Woes. Early Success

Met and attended all my youthful Wars ;

And when I rush'd amidst the dreadful Battel,

The weaker *Genii* of our *Asian* Monarchs

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Shrunk from the Force of a superior Fate ;
O'er-match'd they fell, and by my Sword were swept
Like common Beings from the glorious Field.
Then was the Day of joyous Triumph, then
My Soul was lifted high, ev'n to the Stars.
But now ! What am I now ? O damn'd Reverse of
Fortune !

Now when my Age would be indulg'd in Ease,
And joy in Pleasure of my former Fame,
Now I am curs'd ; held at a Villain's Mercy,
My Foes Derision, and the Scorn of Cowards.

Artax. Oh ! Torture of my Soul ! damn'd racking
Thought !

Am not I too reserv'd for servile Vassalage ?
To be the Subject of a Boy's Command ?
A Boy by Nature set beneath my Sway ?
And born to be my Slave ! Shall he triumph,
And bid me live or die ? Shall he dispose
His beardless Visage to a scornful Smile,
And tell me that his Pleasure is my Fate ?
No ! my disdainful Soul shall struggle out
And start at once from its dishonour'd Mansion.

Mem. Oh ! Royal Thought ! Nor shall they keep
Death,

Altho its common Means be not in reach.
Shall my old Soldier's outside rough and hardy,
Scarr'd o'er with many an honourable Mark,
Be cag'd for publick Scorn ? Shall a Dog tell me,
Thus didst thou once, and now thou art my Slave ;
My Foot shall spurn thee, tread upon thy Neck,
And trample in the Dust thy Silver Hairs ?
Shall I not rather choak ? Hold in my Breath ?
Or smear some Wall or Pillar with my Brains ?

Artax. Rage or some God shall save us from Dishonour.
But, O my Father ! Can we take our flight,
Tho to the Stars, and leave my Love behind ?
Where is she now ? Where is my Queen ! my Bride !
My Charmer ! my *Amestris* !

Mem. Speak not of her.

Artax. Not speak ! —————

Mem.

Mem. Nor think of her if possible.

Artax. Was she not snatch'd, torn from my helpless Arms,

Whilst every God look'd on and saw the Wrong,
Heard her loud Cries, which vainly strove to rouse
Their slow unready Vengeance ? Was she not
Forc'd from my panting Bosom (yet I live !)
Ev'n on our Bridal Day ? Then, when our Flames
Were kindly join'd, and made but one Desire ;
Then, when she sigh'd and gaz'd, and blush'd and sigh'd ;
When every Touch, when every Joy grew fiercer,
And those that were behind were more than mortal.
To lose her then ! Oh ! ———

And yet you bid me think of her no more.

Mem. I do ; for the bare mention turns my Brain,
And ev'n now I border upon Madness ;
So dreadful is the very Apprehension
Of what may be.

Artax. Can we make Thought go back ?
Will it not turn again, cleave to our Breasts,
And urge remembrance till it sting us home ?
Ha ! Now the ghastly Scene is set before me ;
And as thou said'st it runs me to Distraction.
Behold her Beauties, form'd for Kings to serve,
Held vile, and treated like an abject Slave !
Helpless amidst her cruel Foes she stands,
Insulting *Artemisa* mocks her Tears,
And bids her call the Gods and me in vain.

Mem. Would that were all.

Artax. Ha ! Whither would'st thou drive me ?

Mem. Did you like me consider that Dog *Mirza*,
Early to Hell devoted, and the Furies,
Born, nurs'd, and bred a Villain, you would fear
The worst Effects his Malice could express
On Vertue which he hates, when in his power.

Artax. What is the worst ?

Mem. What my old faltering Tongue
Trembles to utter ; goatish Lust and Rape.

Artax. Ha ! Rape ! If there are Gods, it is impossible.

Mem. Oh ! dreadful Image for a Father's Thought,

To

68 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

To have his only Child, her Sex's Boast,
 The Joy of Sight, and Comfort of his Age,
 Dragg'd by a villain Slave, his ruthless Hand
 Wound in her Hair, to some remote dark Cell,
 A Scene for Horror fit, there to be blotted
 By his foul Lust, till Appetite be gorg'd.
 Let me grow savage first, let this old Hand
 That oft has bless'd her, in her Blood be drench'd ;
 Let me behold her dead, dead at my foot,
 To spare a Father's greater Shame and Sorrow.

Artax. A Father ! What's a Father's Plague to mine ;
 A Husband, and a Lover ! If it can be,
 If there is such a hoarded Curse in store,
 Transfix me now, ye Gods, now let your Thunder
 Fall on my Head, and strike me to the Centre,
 Left if I should survive my ruin'd Honour
 And injur'd Love, I should ev'n curse your Godheads,
 Run banning and blaspheming through the World,
 And with my Execrations fright your Worshippers
 From kneeling at your Altars.

Enter Cleone with a dark Lanthorn and Key.

Cleo. This way the echoing Accents seem to come :
 Sure 'tis the wretched Prince ! Oh can you hear him,
 And yet refuse to lend your Aid, ye Gods ?

Artax. This Gloom of horrid Night suits well my Soul.
 Love, Sorrow, conscious Worth, and Indignation,
 Stir mad Confusion in my lab'ring Breast,
 And I am all o'er Chaos.

Cleo. Is this, alas !
 The State of *Artaxerxes*, *Persia's* Heir ?
 Not one poor Lamp to cheer the dismal Shade
 Of this huge holy Dungeon ; Slaves, Murderers,
 Villains that Crosses wait for, are not us'd thus :
 I'll shew my self.

[She turns the Light, and comes towards Artax.
(and Mem.

Mem. Ha ! whence this Gleam of Light ?

Artax. Fate is at hand, let's haste to bid it welcome,

It

It brings an end of Wretchedness.

Cleo. Speak lower ;

I am a Friend : long live Prince *Artaxerxes*.

Artax. What Wretch art thou that hail'st me with a
Curse ?

Come from that Cloud that muffles up thy Face,
And if thou hast a Dagger, shew it boldly :
We wish to die.

Cleo. Think better of my Errand,
I bring you Blessings, Liberty and Life,
And come the Minister of happier Fate :

[*Turns the Light on her self.*

Now down my Blood ! down to my trembling Heart,
Nor sparkle in my Visage to betray me. [*Aside.*

Artax. Ha ! as I live, a Boy ! a blushing Boy !
Thou wer't not form'd sure for a Murderer's Office ;
Speak then, and tell me what and whence thou art.

Cleo. Oh ! seek not to unveil a trivial Secret,
Which known imports you not. I am a Youth
Abandon'd to Misfortunes from my Birth,
And never knew one Cause to joy in Life,
But this that puts it in my power to save
A Prince like *Artaxerxes*. Ask no more,
But follow through the Mazes that I tread,
Until you find your safety.

Artax. Thus forbidding
Thou giv'st me cause t'enquire : Are then the Guards,
That when the Day went down, with strictest Watch
Observ'd the Temple-Gates, remov'd or fled ?

Cleo. They are not, but with numbers reinforc'd
Keep every Passage ; only one remains
Thro *Mirza's* Palace, open to your Flight.

Mem. Ha ! *Mirza* ! there's Damnation in his Name,
Ruin, Deceit, and Treachery attend it ;
Can Life, can Liberty, or Safety come
From him ? or ought that has an Int'rest in him ?
Rather, suspect this feigning Boy his Instrument,
To plunge us deeper yet, if possible,
In Misery ; perhaps some happy Accident,
As yet to us unknown, preserves us from

70 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

The utmost Malice of his Hate, while here.
This sets his wicked Wit at work to draw us
Forth from this holy Place; much better be
The Pris'ners of the Gods, than wear his Fetters.

Cleo. Unfortunate Suspicion! What shall I say
To urge 'em to be safe, and yet preserve
My wretched self unknown?

Artax. Surely that Face
Was not design'd to hide dissembled Malice:
Say, Youth, art thou of *Mirza's* House, (as sure thou must,
If thou pretend'st to lead us that way forth)
And canst thou be a Friend of *Artaxerxes*?
Whom that fell Dog, that Minister of Devils,
With most opprobrious Injuries has loaded.

Cleo. Tho I am his, yet sure I never shar'd
His Hate; shall I confess and own my Shame?
Oh Heavens! ———

[*Aside.*

Mem. Mark th' unready Traytor stammers;
Half-bred and of the mungrel Strain of Mischief,
He has not Art enough to hide the Cheat,
His deep-designing Lord had better plotted.
Away! thinks he so poorly of our Wit,
To gull us with a Novice? If our Fate
Has giv'n us up, and mark'd us for Destruction,
Tell him, we are resolv'd to meet it here.

Cleo. Yet hear me, Prince, since you suspect me sent
By *Mirza*, to ensnare you, know I serve,
Oh Gods! to what am I reduc'd! (*Aside*) ——— his
Daughter:

Some God compassionate of your Woes has stirr'd
A Woman's Pity in her softer Breast;
And 'tis for her I come to give you Liberty.
I beg you to believe me.

[*She weeps.*

Artax. See, he weeps!

Mem. The waiting Tears stood ready for Command,
And now they flow to varnish the false Tale.

Artax. His Daughter, say'st thou? I have seen the
Maid,

Dost thou serve her? And could she send thee to me?
'Tis an unlikely Riddle.

Mem.

Mem. Perhaps 'tis meant,
That she who shares his poisonous Blood, shall share
The Pleasure of his Vengeance, and inure
The Woman's Hands and Eyes to Death and Mischief.
But thou her Instrument, be gone and say,
The Fate of Princes is not Sport for Girls.

Cleo. Some envious Power blasts my pious Purpose,
And nought but Death remains : O that by that
I might persuade him to believe and trust me ;
And fly that Fate which with the Morning waits him.

[*Aside.*

I grieve, my Lord, to find your hard Suspicion
Debars me from preserving your dear Life,
(Which not your own *Amestris* wishes more)
To-morrow's Dawn (Oh ! let me yet prevail)
The cruel Queen resolves shall be your last.
Oh fly ! Let me conjure you, save your self.
May that most awful God that here is worship'd
Deprive me of his chearful Beams for ever,
Make me the wretched'st thing he sees while living,
And after Death the lowest of the Damn'd,
If I have any thought but for your safety.

Artax. No, I have found the Malice of my Mistress,
Since I refus'd her Love when she was proffer'd
By her ambitious Father for my Bride,
And on a worthier Choice bestow'd my Heart,
She vows Revenge on me for slighted Beauty.

Cleo. My Lord, you do her most unmanly wrong,
She owns the Merit of the fair *Amestris*,
Nor ever durst imagine she deserv'd you.
Oh ! spare that Thought, nor blot her Virgin's Fame.
In-silence still she wonder'd at your Vertues,
Bless'd you, nor at her own ill Fate repin'd ;
This wounds her most, that you suspect unkindly
Th' officious Piety that would have sav'd you.
Careless of an offended Father's Rage ;
For you alone concern'd, she charg'd me guide you
When Midnight Sleep had clos'd observing Eyes,
Safe thro her Father's with this Key—
And if I met with any that durst bar

Your

72 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Your Passage forth, she bid me greet him thus——

[*Stabs her self.*

Artax. (*catching her as she falls*) What hast thou done,
rash Boy ?

Cleo. Giv'n you the last,
And only Proof remain'd, that could convince you
I held your Life much dearer than my own.

Mem. Horrid Amazement chills my very Veins !

Cleo. Let me conjure you with my latest Breath,
Make haste to seize the means that may preserve you ;
This Key amidst the Tumult of this Night [*Giving the*
Will open you a way thro *Mirza's* Palace. *Key.*

May every God assist and guard your Flight ;
And, Oh ! when all your Hopes of Love and Glory
Are crown'd with just Success, will you be good,
And think with Pity on the lost *Cleone*.

Artax. Ten thousand dismal Fancies crowd my Thoughts :
Oh ! is it possible thou canst be she,
Thou most unhappy Fair-one ?

Cleo. Spare my Shame,
Nor call the Blood, that flows to give me Peace,
Back to my dying Cheeks. Can you forget
Who was my Father ? And remember only
How much I wish'd I had deserv'd your Friendship ?
Nay, let my Tongue grow bold, and say, your Love ;
But 'twas not in my Fate.

Artax. What shall I say,
To witness how my grateful Heart is touch'd ?
But, Oh ! why would'st thou give this fatal Instance ?
Why hast thou stain'd me with thy Virgin Blood ?
I swear, sweet Saint, for thee I could forgive
The Malice of thy Father, tho he seeks
My Life and Crown ; thy Goodness might atone
Ev'n for a Nation's Sins ; look up and live,
And thou shalt still be near me as my Heart.

Cleo. Oh charming Sounds ! that gently lull my Soul
To everlasting Rest ; I swear 'tis more,
More Joy to die thus bless'd than to have liv'd
A Monarch's Bride ; may every Blessing wait you
In War and Peace, still may you be the greatest,

The

The Ambitious Step-Mother. 73

The Favourite of the Gods, and Joy of Men——

I faint! Oh! let me lean upon your Arm——

[*She dies.*

Artax. Hold up the Light, my Father; Ha! she
Swoons!

The Iron-hand of Death is on her Beauties,
And see, like Lillies nipp'd with Frost, they languish.

Mem. My tough old Soldier's Heart melts at the Sight,
And an unwonted Pity moves my Breast.
Ill-fated Maid, too good for that damn'd Race,
From which thou drew'st thy Being! Sure the Gods,
Angry e'er while, will be at length appeas'd
With this egregious Victim: let us tempt 'em
Now while they seem to smile.

Artax. A Beam of Hope,
Strikes thro my Soul, like the first infant Light,
That glanc'd upon the Chaos; if we reach
The open City, Fate may be ours again:
But Oh! whate'er Success or Happiness
Attend my Life, still fair unhappy Maid,
Still shall thy Memory be my Grief and Honour.
On one fix'd Day in each returning Year,
Cypress and Myrtle for thy Sake I'll wear,
Ev'n my *Amestris* thy hard Fate shall mourn,
And with fresh Roses crown thy Virgin Urn.
Till, in *Elysium* blest'd, thy gentle Shade
Shall own my Vows of Sorrow justly paid. [*Exeunt.*

G


ACT



ACT V.

SCENE I. *Mirza's Palace.*

Enter Mirza, Magas, and Attendants with Lights.

Mirz.  HO! You o'er-rate the Danger.

Mag. If I do,

We err in the Extreame, since you esteem it

As much too lightly ; think you then 'tis nothing,
This horrid Jar of Tumult and Confusion ?
Heads white with Years, and vers'd in long Experience,
Who yet remember all the different Changes
A rolling Age produces, cannot call
To Mind one Instance dreadful as this Night.
Infernal Discord, hideous to behold,
Hangs like its evil Genius o'er the City,
And sends a Snake to every vulgar Breast.
From several Quarters the mad Rabble swarm,
Arm'd with the Instruments of hasty Rage,
And in confus'd disorderly Array
Most formidable march: their differing Clamours,
Together join'd, compose the deafning Sound ;
Arm ! Arm ! they cry, Religion is no more,
Our Gods are slighted, whom if we revenge not,
War, Pestilence, and Famine will ensue,
And universal Ruin swallows all.

Mirz. A Crew of mean unthinking heartless Slaves,
With ease stirr'd up to Mutiny, and quell'd
With the same ease, with like Expressions shew
Their Joy or Anger, both are Noise and Tumult.
Add still when Holidays make Labour cease,
They meet and shout : do these deserve our Fears ?

Mag.

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Mag. Most certainly they may ; if we consider
Each Circumstance of Peril that concurs ;
Tigranes, with the rest that 'scap'd the Temple,
Are mix'd amongst this Herd, and urge the Wrongs
Which with the Gods their Prince and *Memnon* suffer,

Mirz. Nor need we fear ev'n that, safe in the Aid
And Number of our Friends, who treble theirs :
For this mad Rout that hum and swarm together
For want of somewhat to employ their Folly,
Indulge 'em in their Fancy for Religion.
Thou and thy holy Brotherhood of Priests,
Shall in Procession bear the sacred Fire,
And all our golden Gods ; let their Friends judge
If still they look not kindly as of old :
'Tis a most apt Amusement for a Crowd,
They'l gaze, and gather round the gaudy Shew,
And quite forget the Thoughts of Mutiny.
A Guard shall wait you.

Mag. Why go not you too with us ?
They hold your Wisdom in most high regard,
And will be greatly sway'd by your Perswasion,
Th' occasion is well worth your Care and Presence.

Mirz. O ! you'l not need my Aid : Besides, my Friend,
My Hours this Night are destin'd to a Task
Of more import, than are the Fates of Millions
Such grovelling Souls as theirs. As yet the Secret
Is immature, nor worth your present Knowledge :
To-morrow that and all my Breast is yours.
I must not, dare not trust him with my Weakness,
'Twill mark me for his Scorn ; 'tis yet some Wisdom,
If we must needs be Fools, to hide our Folly. [*Aside.*]

Mag. He means the Pris'ners death, let him engross
The People's hate, monopolize Damnation,
I will be safely ignorant of Mischief. [*Aside.*]
Hereafter, when your Wisdom shall think fit
To share those Thoughts, and trust 'em with your Friend,
I shall be pleas'd to know ; this instant Hour,
My Cares are all employ'd on my own Province,
Which hastes me hence.

Mirz. May all your Gods assist you.

[*Exeunt.*
SCENE

SCENE II.

*An Apartment in Mirza's Palace.**Enter Amestris.*

Ames. Will ye not hear, ye ever gracious Gods ?
 Since sure you do not joy in our Misfortunes,
 But only try the Strength of our frail Vertue.
 Are not my Sorrows full ? Can ought be added ?
 My Royal Lord, and Father ! ye dear Names
 In which my all of Happinefs was summ'd,
 What have the Ministers of Fate done with you ?
 Are you not dead ? Too sure ! That's past a doubt ;
 O *Memnon* ! Oh my Prince ! My Father ! Oh my
 Husband !

Enter Mirza.

Mirz. Such *Juno* was (except alone those Tears)
 When, upon *Ida's* Top, she charm'd the God,
 That long had been a Stranger to her Bed ;
 Made him forget the Business of the World,
 And lay aside his Providence, t'employ
 The whole Divinity upon her Beauty.
 And sure 'twas worth the while, had I been *Jove*,
 So had I too been pleas'd to be deceiv'd
 Into immortal Joys. Oh cease thy Tears ! —

Ames. Give'em me back, or if the Grave and thou
 Restore to none, Oh join my Fate to theirs ;
 Shut us together in some silent Vault,
 Where I may sit and weep till Death's kind Hand
 Shall lay me gently by my Lord's dear side,
 And hush my Sorrows in eternal Slumber.

Mirz. In pity to your Form assuage those Tears,
 Sorrow is Beauty's Bane ; nor let your Breast
 Harbour a Fear : I wage not War with fair ones ;

But

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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But wish you would efface those ugly Thoughts,
That live in your Remembrance to perplex you;
Let Joy, the Native of your Soul, return,
And Love's gay God sit smiling in your Eyes,
As e'rst he did; I wish you wondrous well,
And would so fully recompence the Loss
You fondly mourn, that when you count the Gains,
Your self should own your Fortunes are well chang'd.

Amef. Oh impious Comforter! talk'ft thou of Joy,
When Nature dictates only Death and Horror,
Is there a God can break the Laws of Fate?
And give me back the precious Lives I've lost?
What nam'ft thou Recompence? Can ought atone
For Blood? A Father's and a Husband's Blood?
Such Comfort brings the hungry midnight Wolf,
When having slain the Shepherd, smear'd with Gore,
He leaps amidst the helpless bleating Flock.

Mirz. Away with this Perverseness of thy Sex,
These foolish Tears, these peevish Sighs and Sobblings!
Look up, be gay, and cheer me with thy Beauties,
And, to thy wish I will indulge thy Fancy,
Not all the imagin'd Splendor of the Gods
Shall match thy Pomp, sublimely shalt thou shine,
The Boast and Glory of our *Asian* World;
Nor shall one She of all thy towering Sex
Out-rival thee (thou lovely Fair) in Power,
Oh think on Power, on Power and Place supreme.

Amef. There is but one, one only thing to think on,
My murder'd Lord, and his dark gaping Grave,
That waits unclos'd impatient of my coming.

Mirz. Oh listen, gentle Maid, while I impart
A Story of such softness to thy Ear,
As (like the Halcyon brooding o'er the Waves)
May with its Influence hush thy stormy Griefs.

Amef. Begone, and if thou bear'ft one Thought of
Pity
In that hard Breast; Oh leave me to my self,
Nor by thy Presence, hideous to my Soul,
And horrid Consolations, strive to add

78 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

To my full Woes that swell'd without thy help,
All ready rise and bubble o'er the Margen,

Mirz. What if I talk'd of Love?

Amesf. Of Love! Oh Monster!

Mirz. If Love be monstrous, so is this fair Frame,
This beauteous World, this Canopy, the Sky;
That sparkling shines with Gems of Light innumerable,
And so art thou and I, since Love made all;
Who kindly reconcil'd the jarring Atoms
In friendly League, and bid 'em be a World.
Frame not thy lovely Mouth then to blaspheme
Thy great Creator, thou art his, and made for
His more peculiar Service; thy bright Eyes,
Thy moist red Lip, thy rising snowy Bosom,
Thy every Part was made to furnish Joy,
Ev'n to a riotous Excess of Happiness;
Oh give me but to taste thy blissful Charms,
And take my Wealth, my Honour, Power, take all,
A'l, all for Recompence.

Amesf. Execrable Wretch!

Thus! Is it thus thou wouldst assuage my Sorrows?
When thy inhuman bloody Cruelty,
Now with redoubling Pangs cleaves my poor Heart,
Com'st thou bespotted with the recent Slaughter
To proffer impious Love? Accursed Fiend!
Horror and Grief shall turn me to a Fury,
Still with my echoing Cries I will pursue thee,
And halloo Vengeance in thy guilty Ears;
Vengeance for Murder! for my Prince's Murder!
And for my poor old Father! Think not Villain,
Who art the Plague and Scourge of human kind,
That there is Peace for thee, whilst I run mad
With raging Sorrow; Vengeance, Vengeance waits thee,
Great as my Woes! — My dear! dear! *Artaxerxes!*

Mirz. I am not lucky at the glossing Art
Of catching Girls with words, but 'tis no matter,
Force is a sure Resort, and when at last
Fierce as a towering Falcon from her Height,
I stoop to strike the Prey, it is my own.

[*Aside.*
Obstinate

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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Obstinate Fool, how dar'st thou cross my Wishes?
Since the same Hand that has aveng'd me well
Upon my other Foes commands thy Fate ;
Tho Mercy in Compassion of thy Beauty
Reach out her Hand to save thee, yet if urg'd,
Revenge may still take place : think well on that.

Ames. That, that is all the Mercy which I ask,
Indulge thy thirsty Malice in my Blood,
And hasten me to Peace. My Woman's Heart
Shall gather all its little Stock of Courage
To arm me for the Blow. Tho Death be terrible,
Ghastly and pale, yet I will joy to meet him ;
My better Life already is destroy'd,
Imperfect now, and wanting half my self,
I wander here in vain, and want thy Hand
To guide and re-unite me to my Lord.

Mirz. Alas ! thou hast not read aright thy Destiny,
Matter of much import requires thy Life,
And still detains thee here : Come, I'll instruct thee,
And put thee in the way of Fate's Design.

[*Laying hold on her.*

Ames. Unhand me, Villain !

Mirz. Nay, you must not struggle,
Nor frown, and look askew ; fantastick Sex !
That put Men on the Drudgery to force you
To your own Satisfaction.

Ames. Let me go,
Abhor'd, detested Monster ! Shall he brave you,
You awful Gods ? Shall not your Lightning blast him ?

Mirz. Oh no ! Your Gods have Pleasures of their
own,
Some mortal Beauty charms the wanton Jove,
Within whose Arms he revels, nor has leisure
To mind thy foolish Screaming.

Ames. Hear me now, sweet Heaven,
Save me, ye Gods ! Oh save me ! save me ! save me !

Mirz. Come, come along ! you see you strive in vain.

[*Striving with her.*

Ames. Is there no hope of Aid from Gods or Men ?

Oh

80 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Oh let me turn to thee then, kneel to thee,
And with my Pray'rs and Tears implore thy Pity.

Mirz. Speak, for Enchantment dwells upon thy
Tongue,

And all the fluttering Spirits in my Blood
Dance nimbly on to the celestial Sound.

Amesf. What shall I say to move him to Compassion?
Thus groveling, prostrate thus upon the Earth,
Let me conjure you, spare my Virgin-Honour,
Spare to commit a Wrong to you unprofitable,
Yet worse to me than Torments, Racks, and Death;
Kill me, the last of my unhappy Race,
And let old *Memnon's* Name with me be lost,
If Death be not enough, let me live wretched,
Pull off these Robes, and cloath me like a Slave,
Then send me out to labour at some Village,
Where I may groan beneath a cruel Master,
Be hardly us'd, and want ev'n Food and Rayment;
Till Cold, and Dirt, and Poverty shall change,
And make me loathsome as my Fellow-Wretches.
Oh! Let my Rags claim only this one Privilege,
To wrap me in the Grave a spotless Maid.

Mirz. That Tongue which pleads makes all Intreating
vain,

Thy every Motion, each complaining Accent
Warms me afresh, and urges new Desire;
Thou art, thou must be mine, nor Heaven, nor Earth,
Nor the conspiring Power of Hell shall save thee;
I long to lose my Age in thy Embraces,
To bask and wanton in thy warmer Sun,
Till a new Youth shoot thro me.

Amesf. Chast *Diana*,

And thou the Guardian of the Marriage-Bed,

[*Getting loose from him.*

Thou Royal *Juno*, Oh protect thy Votary.

Mirz. My jaded Age and weak enervate Limbs
Falter and shrink unequal to their Office.

I prithee, yield, come, yield, and be a Queen!

[*Laying hold on her again.*
Yield,

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81

Yield, and be any thing ! I cannot bear
These fierce convulsive Starts, this raging Flame
That drinks my Blood.

Ames. Oh never, never, never !

A Cause like this will turn me to a Fighter,
To my last Gasp, to Death I will resist.

Mirz. My coward Strength, dost thou go back from
Beauty ?

Rouze, and deserve the Pleasure thou wouldst taste.

Ames. Unmanly Traytor ! — seize him all ye Fiends.

In the Struggle she draws his own Poniard and stabs him.

Mirza falling.] Damnation, Oh my Heart ! the cursed
Steel

Has struck me to the Earth.

Ames. There sink for ever !

Nor rise again to plague the wretched World.

Mirz. My heated Blood ebbs out, and now too late
My cooler Reason bids me curse my Folly ;
Oh Idiot, Idiot ! to be caught so poorly ;
Where are thy fine Arts now ? Unravel'd all,
Mangl'd and cut to Pieces by a Girl !
Oh Shame of Wisdom ! When Revenge was sure,
And Fate was in my Grasp, to lose it all,
Neglect the noble Game, and run out my Years,
On the pursuit of Joys I could not taste ;
My Memory must be the Jest of Boys.

Ames. My boasted Courage sinks at sight of Blood,

[Letting fall the Poniard.]

Thou justly shed, and I grow stiff with Horror.

[Mirza attempting to rise, falls again.]

Mirz. It w'ont be ! Life gushes out again,
And I shall die without Revenge or Aid ;
What Noise is that ? without there, Help !

[Trampling without.]

Ames. Oh Heavens !
What will become of me ?

Enter

82 *The Ambitious Step-Mother.*

Enter Orchanes hastily.

Orch. My Lord ! Where are you ?
Bleeding ! and on the Ground ! What wretched Accident ? ———

Then Fate resolves to make this Night compleat,
Such as succeeding Horrors ne'er shall march.

Mirz. Oh my *Orchanes* ! I am fall'n vilely,
And this last part of Life will fully all
The Wisdom and Renown of what is past,
Methought thou talk'dst of Horrors, speak 'em boldly,
And try if ought can add to this Confusion.

Orch. Prepare, my Lord, and summon all your Wisdom,
Your utmost Constancy of Soul to hear———

Mirz. No more ! I cannot wait thy Preparation;
Let the ill Fortune take me as it finds me.

Orch. Then hear it thus ; your Daughter's dead.———

Mirz. My Daughter !
Thy Words have met with an unguarded Side,
And pierce ev'n thro my Soul. Say, How ? Where ?
Tell me ! ———

Orch. As with a Guard I kept the Temple-Gates,
I heard old *Memnon* and the Pris'ner Prince
Loud as the roaring Ocean in a Storm,
Echoing their Rage thro the vast sounding Dome,
When on a sudden, e'er the Night had gain'd
Four Hours at most, the Noise was hush'd in Silence,
Wond'ring and curious of the Cause, I enter'd,
And found, Oh Grief to Sight ! your lovely Daughter
Dress'd like a Boy, then warm, and newly dead,
One Wound was on her Breast. Why she was there,
Or how, we know not ; to compleat the Ill,
The Pris'ners both are fled.

Mirz. Fled ! 'tis impossible.
Ha ! which way ? whither ? how ? they could not fly !

Ames. O wondrous Turn of Joy ! Are they not dead
then ?

Orch.

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Orch. They could not 'scape the Guards ; no other
Passage

Remain'd but yours, and ev'n that was fast.
Upon the instant I beset each Avenue
Which to your Palace leads ; happily as yet
They are not pass'd from thence.

Amesf. Guard 'em, ye Gods !

Mirz. Find 'em again, *Orchanes*, e'er I die,
Or I am more than double damn'd ; this Loss
Is worse than mine, worse than my Daughter's death,
'Tis death of my Revenge. Malicious Fortune !
She took the Moment when my Wisdom nodded,
And ruin'd me at once. O doating Fool !
Thou Fool of Love, and of pernicious Woman !
I sicken ; Nature fails me : Oh Revenge !
Will not thy Cordial keep back flying Life ?
It shall ! *Orchanes* drag that Trayt'ress to me.

Amesf. Oh if thou art a Man, I charge thee loose me,
And scorn his bidding, scorn to be his Slave,
A Devil's Drudge in Mischief. Save me from Death,
Have pity on my Youth, Oh spare my Youth !

Orchanes pulls Amestris down to Mirza.

Mirz. Hearken not to her ; drag her, pull her down !
Shall *Memnon* boast of thee, while I die Childless ?
No, to *Cleone's* Ghost thou art a Victim.
Oh could I but have seen thee with those Eyes
I view thee now, I had been wise and safe ;
That Face shall make no more Fools in this World,
Down ! bear thy fatal Beauties down to Hell,
And try if thou can'st charm amongst the Dead :
Die Witch ! Enchantress die ! [*He stabs her.*]

Amesf. Ah ! Mercy Heavens !

Mirz. I thank thee, Hand, at least for this last Service.
Now fly *Orchanes*, haste and tell the Queen,
My latest Breath stays for her.—Something I would
[*Exit Orchanes.*]
Important to her Service.—I breathe short,
Life

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Life stays in pain, and struggles to be gone,
I strive in vain to hold it——Ha! what mean
These fleeting Shades that dance before my Sight?
'Tis Death, I feel it plain; the dreadful Change
That Nature starts at. Death! —— Death! —— What
is Death?

'Tis a vast Disquisition, Priests and Scholars
Enquire whole Ages, and are yet in Doubt;
My Head turns round! ——I cannot form one Thought
That pleases me about it,——Dying —— must resolve me.

[*Mirza dies.*

Ames. Oh my hard Fortune! Must I die? die now?
When *Artaxerxes* calls and bids me live.
His dear lov'd Image stays my parting Soul,
And makes it linger in its ruin'd House.
Ha! sure he's dead! ——'tis so, and now he stands

[*Looking on Mirza.*

Arraign'd before the dread impartial Judges,
To answer to a long Account of Crimes;
Had I but strength, perhaps my Fate may yet [*Rising.*
Find out a way to save me.
My Love and Father make Life worth my Care,
Alas! My Blood flows fast; this way I think.

[*Goes off faintly.*

[*Enter at the other side Artaxerxes and Memnon, with
a Sword and Dark-Lanthorn.*

Mem. Ha! here are Lights, hold up thy Weapon,
Son.

Artax. And see Blood, and a Body on the Floor:
What means this Scene of Death? What Wretch art
thou?

Oh all ye juster Powers! 'tis *Mirza*, see,
He seems now dead.

Mem. Damnation then is now to him,
And if there be one deeper Pit of Sepulchre,
One Plague above the rest in those dark Regions,

He

He as the most abandon'd Dog may claim it,
And vie for Preference with Devils themselves:

Re-enter Amestris.

Ames. The Doors are guarded, Fate has clos'd me round.

Artax. Ha! art thou my *Amestris*!

Mem. Oh my Daughter! [They run to her.

Ames. Are ye then come at last to bless my Eyes,
Which could not close without one parting View.
Oh hold me, or I sink!——

Mem. Alas! my Child——

Artax. My cruel Fair, why art thou pale and faint?
Ha, whence this Blood? Oh killing Spectacle!

Ames. Forth from my Heart the crimson River flows,
My lavish Heart that hastily consumes
Its small Remain of Life: Oh lay me gently
On my last Bed the Earth, whose cold hard Bosom
Must shortly be the Place of my long Rest.

Mem. What have we done? or, Oh! if we have
finn'd,

What has thy Innocence done to merit this?

Ames. That Villain *Mirza*——

Mem. Ha! Say, what of him?

Ames. Offer'd most brutal Outrage to my Honour.

Artax. Oh ye eternal Rulers of the World,
Could you look on unmov'd? But say, instruct me,
That I might bow before the God that sav'd thee.

Ames. Sure 'twas some chaster Power that made me
bold,

And taught my trembling Hand to find the way
With his own Poniard to the Villain's Heart.

Mem. Thou art my Daughter still! Oh noble Action!
That gives in Death an interval of Joy.

Ames. Just in that Hour of Fate a Villain enter'd,
By whose Assistance the revengeful *Mirza*
Forc'd me to share Death with him.

Artax. 'Tis past, 'tis past;

H

[Lying down.
And

And all those Fires that lighted up my Soul,
 Glory and bright Ambition languish now,
 And leave me dark and gloomy as the Grave.
 Oh thou soft dying Sweetness! — Shall I rage
 And curse my self? Curse ev'n the Gods? — Oh no;
 I am the Slave of Fate, and bow beneath
 The Load that presses me; am sunk to Earth,
 And ne'er shall rise again: here will I sit
 And gaze till I am nothing.

Ames. Alas! my Lord,
 Fain would I strive to bid you not be sad,
 Fain would I cheer your Grief, but 'tis in vain;
 I know by my own Heart it is impossible;
 For we have lov'd too well. Oh mournful Nuptials!
 Are these the Joys of Brides? Indeed 'tis hard,
 'Tis very hard to part; I cannot leave you,
 The agonizing Thought distracts me; hold me,
 Oh hold me fast, Death shall not tear me from you.

Artax. Oh could my Arms fence thee from Destiny,
 The Gods might launch their Thunder on my Head,
 Plague me with Woes treble to what I feel:
 With Joy I would endure it all to save thee.

What shall I say? What shall I do to save thee?
 Grief shakes my Frame, it melts my very Temper;
 My manly Constancy and Royal Courage
 Run gushing thro' my Eyes; Oh my *Amestris*!

Ames. And see my Father! his white Beard is wet
 With the sad Dew.

Mem. I try'd to man my Heart,
 But could not stand the Buffer of this Tempest,
 It tears me up — My Child! Ha! art thou dying?

Ames. Indeed I am very sick, Oh hold me up!
 My Pain increases, and a cold damp Dew
 Hangs on my Face. Is there no Help? No Ease?
 Have I your Arm, my Love?

Artax. Thou hast my Heart.
 Dost thou yet hold?

Ames. Say, will you not forget me
 When I am laid to moulder in the Tomb?

'Tis

The Ambitious Step-Mother.

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'Tis sure you will not, still there will be room,
For my Remembrance in your noble Heart;
I know you lov'd me truly: Now! I faint!
Oh shield me, shield me from that ugly Fantom,
The Cave of Death! How dark and deep it is!
I tremble at the Sight——'tis hideous Horror!——
The Gloom grows o'er me——Let me not lie there.

[Amestris dies.]

Artax. There Life gave way, and the last rosy Breath
Went in that Sigh. Death, like a brutal Victor,
Already enter'd, with rude haste defaces
The lovely Frame he has master'd; see how soon
These starry Eyes have lost their Light and Lustre!
Stay, let me close their Lids. Now for the rest.
Old Memnon! Ha! Grief has transfix'd his Brain,
And he perceives me not!——Now what of thee?
Think'st thou to live, thou Wretch? Think not of any

thing;
Thought is Damnation, 'tis the Plague of Devils
To think on what they are. And see, this Weapon
Shall shield me from it, plunge me in Forgetfulness,
E'er the dire Scorpion; Thought, can rouse to sting me.
Lend me thy Bosom, my cold Bride: Ill Fortune

[Lying by her.]

Has done its worst, and we shall part no more;
Wait for me, gentle Spirit, since the Stars
Together must receive us! [Stabs himself.] Oh well
aim'd!

How foolish is the Coward's Fear of Death!
Of Death, the gentlest——surest way to Peace.

[Artax. dies.]

[Memnon stands looking on the Bodies some time,
and then speaks.]

Mem. Yet will I gaze! Yet! Tho my Eyes grow stiff
And turn to Steel or Marble: Here's a Sight
To bless a Father! These! These were your Gifts,
Ye bounteous Gods! You'll spare my Thanks for 'em.
You gave me Being too, and spurn me out
To hoary Wretchedness; away, 'twas Cruelty:

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Oh curfed, curfed, curfed fourfcore Years,
 Ye Heap of Ills, ye monftrous Pile of Plagues !
 Sure they lov'd well, the very Streams of Blood,
 That flow from their pale Bofoms, meet and mingle.
 Stay, let me view 'em better—Nay, 'tis thus—
 If thou art like thy Mother—She dy'd too—
 Where is ſhe ? —Ha ! that Dog, that Villain *Mirza* !
 He bears her from me : Shall we not purſue ?—
 The Whirl of Battel comes acrofs me, fly !
 Be gone ! They ſhall not, dare not brave me thus !
 Hey, 'tis a glorious Sound ! ruſh on, my Prince,
 We'll ſtart, and reach the Goal of Fate at once.

[*Runs off.*]

*Enter, on the other ſide, Queen, and Attendants
 with Lights.*

Qu. Why am I ſummon'd with this Call of Death ?
 This is no common Ruin ; *Artaxerxes* !
 And *Memnon*'s Daughter ! *Mirza* thou art fallen
 In pompous Slaughter : Could not all thy Arts,
 That dole'd about Deſtruction to our Enemies,
 Guard thy own Life from Fate ? Vain Boaft of Wiſdom,
 That with fantaſtick Pride, like buſy Children,
 Builds Paper Towns and Houſes, which at once
 The Hand of Chance o'erturns and looſly ſcatters.

I Att. Oh diſmal Sight !

[*Looking out.*]

Qu. What is it frights thy Eyes ?

I Att. Old *Memnon*'s Body.

Qu. 'Tis a grateful Horror.

I Att. Upon the Floor the batter'd Carcaſs lies
 Weltring in Gore, whiſt on the marble Wall
 A dreadful Maſs of Brains, grey Hair, and Blood
 Is ſmear'd in hideous Mixture.

Qu. Fierce Deſpair
 Has forc'd a way for the impetuous Soul.

'Tis well, he is in peace —What means this Tu-
 mult ?

[*Shout, Clashing of Swords.*]

Enter

Enter an Officer, his Sword drawn.

Offic. Fly, Madam, lest your Person be not safe;
The Traytor *Bagoas*, to whose Charge you trusted
The Prince your Son, has drawn the Guards to join him;
And now assisted by the furious Rabble,
On every side they charge those few who keep
This Place and the Temple, with loud Out-cries,
Proclaiming that they mean to free the Pris'ners.
Orchanes, e'er I fled to give you notice,
Fell by the Prince's hand; the raging Torrent
Bore down our weak Resistance, and pursuing
With furious Haste, ev'n trod upon my Flight:
This Instant brings 'em here.

Qu. Let 'em come on,
I cannot fear; this Storm is rais'd too late,
I stand secur'd of all I wish already.

[Shout and Clashing of Swords again.]

*Enter Artaban, Cleanthes, and Attendants, their
Swords drawn.*

Artab. Then Vertue is in vain, since base Deceit
And Treachery have triumph'd o'er the Mighty.
Oh Nature! let me turn my Eyes away,
Lest I am blasted by a Mother's sight.

Qu. Ungrateful Rebel! Do thy impious Arms
Pursue me for my too indulgent Fondness
And Care for thee?

Artab. Well has that Care been shewn;
Have you not foully stain'd my sacred Fame?
Look on that Scene of Blood; the dire Effects
Of cruel Female Arts. But oh what Recompence!
What can you give me for my murder'd Love?
Has not the Labyrinth of your fatal Counsels
Involv'd my fair, my lovely, lost *Cleone*?
By our bright Gods I swear I will assert

The

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The Majesty of Manly Government,
Nor wear again your Chains : Still as our Mother
Be honour'd ; rule amongst your Maids and Eunuchs,
Nor mingle in our State, where mad Confusion
Shakes the whole Frame, to boast a Woman's Cunning.

Qu. Thou talk'st as if thy infant Hand could grasp,
Guide, and command the Fortune of the World ;
But thou art young in Power. Remember, Boy,
Thy Father, once the Hero of his Age,
Was proud to be the Subject of my Sway,
The Warrior to the Woman's Wit gave way,
And found it was his Interest to obey.
And dost thou hope to shake off my Command ?
Dost thou ? the Creature of my forming Hand.
When I assert the Power thou dar'st invade,
Like Heaven, I will resolve to be obey'd,
And rule or ruin that which once I made.

[*Exit Queen and Attendants.*]

Artab. Let a Guard wait the Queen : Tho Nature
plead

For Reverence to her Person, jealous Power
Must watch her subtle and ambitious Wit.
Hast thou secur'd the impious Priest, *Cleanthes* ?
Magas, that Wretch that prostitutes our Gods.

Clean. Already he has met the Fate he merited,
This Night the Hypocrite in grand Procession
March'd thro the City to appease the People,
And bore the Gods along to aid his Purpose :
When on a sudden, like a Hurricane,
That starts at once, and ruffles all the Ocean,
Some Fury more than mortal seiz'd the Crowd ;
At once they rush'd, at once they cry'd Revenge ;
Then snatch'd, and tore the trembling Priest to pieces.
What was most strange, no Injury was offer'd
To any of the Brotherhood beside,
But all their Rage was ended in his Death :
Like formal Justice that severely strikes,
And in an instant is serene and calm.

Artab. Oh my *Cleanthes*, do but cast thy Thoughts

Back

Back on the recent Story of this Night;
And thou with me wilt wonder, and confess
The Gods are great and just. Well have you mark'd,
Celestial Powers, your righteous Detestation
Of Sacrilege, of base and bloody Treachery;
May this Example guide my future Sway;
Let Honour, Truth, and Justice crown my Reign,
Ne'er let my Kingly Word be given in vain,
But ever sacred with my Foes remain,
On these Foundations shall my Empire stand,
The Gods shall vindicate my just Command,
And guard that Power they trusted to my Hand.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

F I N I S.



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